



The most Reverend
DR JOHN TILLOTSON
late Arch-Bishop of Canterbury.

The Remaining
DISCOURSES,
ON THE
Attributes of God.

viz.

His Goodness.
His Mercy.
His Patience.
His Long-suffering.
His Power.
His Spirituality.

His Immensity.
His Eternity.
His Incomprehensibility.
God the first Cause,
and last End.

By the Most Reverend
Dr. **JOHN TILLOTSON**,
Late Lord Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*.

Being The **SEVENTH VOLUME**;
Published from the Originals,
By *Ralph Barker*, D. D. Chaplain to his Grace.

L O N D O N,
Printed for **Rt. Chiswell**, at the *Rose and Crown*
in *St. Paul's Churchyard*, 1700.

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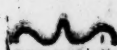
SERMON I.

The Goodness of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

*The Lord is Good to all, and his tender
Mercies are over all his Works.*

THE Subject which I have now
proposed to treat of, is certainly
one of the Greatest and No-
blest Arguments in the World, *the
Goodness of God*, the Highest and most
Glorious Perfection, of the best and
most Excellent of Beings, than which
nothing deserves more to be consider-
ed by us, nor ought in Reason to af-
fect us more. *The Goodness of God* is
the cause, and the continuance of our
Beings, the Foundation of our
Hopes, and the Fountain of our Hap-
piness; our greatest comfort, and our
B fair-

 Vol. VII. fairest Example, the chief Object of our love and praise and admiration, the joy and rejoycing of our hearts; and therefore the Meditation and Discourse of it must needs be pleasant and delightful to us; the great difficulty will be, to confine our selves upon so copious an Argument, and to set bounds to that which is of so vast an extent, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

Which words are an Argument, which the divine Plalmist useth, to stir up himself and others to the praise of God: At the 3. v. he tells us, that *the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised*; and he gives the reason of this, v. 8. and 9. from those Properties and Perfections of the Divine Nature, which declare his Goodness, *the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy; the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*; where you have the Goodness of God declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in respect of the Objects of it; *the Lord is good to all.*

In the handling of this Argument, I shall do these four things.

First,

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First, Consider what is the proper Notion of Goodness, as it is attributed to God. Vol. VII.

Secondly, Shew that this Perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the Effects and the Extent of it.

Fourthly, Answer some Objections, which may seem to contradict and bring in question the Goodness of God.

First, What is the proper Notion of Goodness, as it is attributed to God.

There is a dry *Metaphysical* Notion of Goodness, which only signifies the *Being* and *essential properties* of a thing; but this is a good word ill bestowed; for in this sense, every thing that hath *Being*, even the Devil himself, is good.

And there is a *Moral* Notion of Goodness; and that is twofold.

1. More general, in opposition to all Moral evil and imperfection, which we call sin and vice; and so the *Justice*, and *Truth*, and *Holiness* of God, are in this sense his Goodness. But there is,

2. Another Notion of *Moral* Goodness, which is more particular and restrained; and then it denotes a particular Virtue in opposition to a particular Vice; and this is the proper and u-

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beneficial to them. So that *Goodness* is a readiness and disposition to communicate the good and happiness which we enjoy, and to be willing others should partake of it.

This is the Notion of *Goodness* among men; and 'tis the same in God, only with this difference, that God is originally and transcendently good; but the Creatures are, the best of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from God, who is the fountain and original of goodness; which is the meaning of our Saviour, *Luke 18. 19.* when he says, *there is none good save one, that is God.* But tho' the degrees of *Goodness* in God, and the Creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that *Goodness* which is in us, be so small and inconsiderable, that compared with the *Goodness* of God, it does not deserve that name; yet the essential Notion of *Goodness* in both, must be the same; else when the Scripture speaks of the *Goodness* of God, we could not know the meaning of it, and if we do not at all understand what it is for God to be good, it is all one to us (for ought we know) whether he be good or not; for he may be so, and

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we never the better for it, if we do not know what Goodness in God is, and consequently when he is so, and when not.

Besides that the Goodness of God is very frequently in Scripture propounded to our imitation ; but it is impossible for us to imitate that, which we do not understand what it is ; from whence it is certain, that the goodness which we are to endeavour after, is the same that is in God, because in this we are commanded to imitate the Perfection of God, that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according to the rate and condition of Creatures, and so far as we, whose Natures are imperfect, are capable of resembling the *Divine Goodness*.

Thus much for the Notion of *goodness* in God, *it is a propension and disposition in the Divine Nature, to communicate being and happiness to his Creatures.*

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, in the next place, that this Perfection of *Goodness* belongs to God ; and that from these *three* heads.

I. From the Acknowledgments of Natural Light.

II. From

from the acknowledgment of *Heathens*.

II. From the Testimony of Scripture, and Divine Revelation. And,

III. From the Perfection of the Divine Nature.

I. From the Acknowledgments of Natural Light. The generality of the *Heathen* agree in it, and there is hardly any Perfection of God more universally acknowledged by them. I always except the Sect of the *Epicureans*, who attribute nothing but *Eternity* and *Happiness* to the Divine Nature; and yet if they would have considered it, *Happiness* without *Goodness* is impossible. I do not find that they do expressly deny this Perfection to God, or that they ascribe to him the contrary; but they clearly take away all the Evidence and Arguments of the Divine Goodness; for they supposed God to be an immortal and happy Being, that enjoyed himself, and had no regard to any thing without himself, that neither gave Being to other things, nor concerned himself in the happiness or misery of any of them; so that their Notion of a Deity, was in truth the proper Notion of an idle Being, that is called God, and neither does good nor evil.

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But

The Goodness of God prov'd

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But setting aside this atheistical Sect, the rest of the Heathen did unanimously affirm and believe the Goodness of God; and this was the great foundation of their Religion; and all their Prayers to God, and Praises of him, did necessarily suppose a perswasion of the Divine Goodness. Whosoever prays to God, must have a perswasion, or good hopes of his readiness to do him good; and to praise God, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. *Seneca* hath an excellent passage to this purpose, "He (*says he*) that denies the Goodness of God, does not surely consider the infinite number of Prayers, that with hands lifted up to Heaven are put up to God, both in private and publick; which certainly would not be, nor is it credible, that all Mankind should conspire in this madness of putting up their Supplications to deaf and impotent Deities, if they did not believe, that the Gods were so good, as to confer benefits upon those who prayed to them.

But we need not to infer their belief of God's Goodness, from the acts of their

from the acknowledgment of Heathens.


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their devotion; nothing being more common among them, than expressly

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to attribute this Perfection of Goodness to him, and among the Divine Titles, this always had the preeminence, both among the Greeks and Romans; *ὁς τε μέγας τε*, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their constant stile; and in our Language, the name of God seems to have been given him from his Goodness. I might produce innumerable passages out of the Heathen Authors to this purpose; but I shall only mention that remarkable one out of Seneca, *primus deorum cultus est deos credere; deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas*, "The first act of Worship is to believe
" the Being of God; and the next, to
" ascribe Majesty or greatness to him;
" and to ascribe Goodness, without
" which there can be no Greatness.

II. From the testimony of Scripture and Divine Revelation. I shall mention but a few of those many Texts of Scripture, which declare to us the Goodness of God, Exod.. 34. 6. where God makes his Name known to Moses, *the Lord, the Lord God gracious and merciful, long suffering, abundant in goodness*

 *ness and truth. Psal. 86. 5. Thou Lord*
 Vol. VII. *art good, and ready to forgive. Psal.*
119. 68. Thou art good, and dost good.
 And that which is so often repeated in
 the Book of Psalms, *O give thanks unto*
the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy
endureth for ever. Our blessed Saviour
 attributes this Perfection to God, in
 so peculiar and transcendent a man-
 ner, as if it were incommunicable,
Luke 18. 19. There is none good save
one, that is God. The meaning is, that
 no Creature is capable of it, in that
 excellent and transcendent degree,
 in which the Divine Nature is possess-
 of it.

To the same purpose are those innu-
 merable Testimonies of Scripture,
 which declare God to be gracious, and
 merciful, and long suffering; for these
 are but several Branches of his Good-
 ness; his *Grace* is the freeness of his
 Goodness, to those who have not de-
 served it; his *Mercy* is his Goodness to
 those who are in misery; his *Pati-*
ence is his Goodness to those who
 are guilty, in deferring the Punish-
 ment due to them.

III. The Goodness of God may
 likewise be argued from the Perfection
 of

prov'd from his Perfection:

II


of the Divine Nature, these two ways.

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1. Goodness is the chief of all Perfections, and therefore it belongs to God.

2. There are some Footsteps of it in the Creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in God.


1. Goodness is the highest Perfection, and therefore it must needs belong to God, who is the most perfect of Beings. Knowledge and Power are great Perfections, but separated from Goodness, they would be great Imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An Angel may have Knowledge and Power in a great degree, but yet for all that be a Devil. Goodness is so great and necessary a Perfection, that without it there can be no other, it gives Perfection to all other excellencies; take away this, and the greatest excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greatest imperfections. And therefore our Saviour speaks of the goodness and mercy of God, as the sum of his Perfections; what one Evangelist hath, *be ye merciful, as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful*, is rendred in another, *be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is*

 *is perfect.* Goodness is so essential to a perfect Being, that if we once strip God of this property, we rob him of the Glory of all his other Perfections; and therefore when *Moses* desired to see God's Glory, he said, *he would make all his goodness to pass before him.* *Exod. 33. 19.* This is the most amiable Perfection, and as it were the Beauty of the Divine Nature, *Zach. 9. 17.* *how great is thy goodness, how great is thy beauty?* *fine bonitate nulla majestas, without goodness there can be no majesty.* Other excellencies may cause fear and amazement in us: but nothing but Goodness, can command sincere love and veneration.

2. there are some footsteps of this Perfection in the Creatures, and therefore it must be much more eminently in God. There is in every Creature some representation of some divine Perfection or other, but God doth not own any Creature to be *after his image*, that is destitute of Goodness. The Creatures, that want Reason and Understanding, are incapable of this Moral Goodness we are speaking of; Man is the first in the rank of Creatures, that is endowed with it, and he is
said

said to be made after the image of God,  and to have dominion given him over the Vol. VII.
Creatures below him, to signifie to us,
that if man had not been made after
God's image, in respect of Goodness,
he had been unfit to rule over other
Creatures; because without Goodness,
dominion would be Tyranny and Op-
pression. And the more any Creature
partakers of this Perfection of Good-
ness, the more it resembles God; as
the Blessed Angels, who behold the face
of God continually, and are thereby trans-
formed into his image from glory to glory,
their whole business and imployment
is, to do good; and the Devil, tho' he
resemble God in other Perfections of
Knowledge and Power, yet because he
is evil, and envious, and mischievous,
and so contrary to God in this Per-
fection, he is the most opposite and
and hateful to him of all Creatures
whatsoever.

And if this Perfection be in some de-
gree in the Creature, it is much more
in God; if it be derived from him,
he is much more eminently possess of it
himself. All that Goodness which is in
the best natured of the Sons of Men, or
in the most glorious Angels of Heaven,
is

 is but an imperfect and weak representation of the Divine Goodness.

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The *Third* thing I proposed to consider, was the Effects of the Divine Goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of the Objects of it, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works; thou art good and doest good*, says David, Psal. 119. 68. The great evidence and demonstration of God's Goodness, is from the Effects of it. To the same purpose St. Paul speaks, *Acts* 14. 17. *He hath not left himself without Witness, in that he doth good, and sends us Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seasons.*

I shall consider the Effects of the Divine Goodness, under these *Two Heads*.

I. The universal extent of God's Goodness to all his Creatures.

II. I shall consider more particularly the Goodness of God to Men, which we are more especially concern'd to take notice of.

I. The universal extent of his Goodness to the whole Creation, *the Lord is Good to all*. The whole Creation furnisheth us with clear evidences and demonstrations of the Divine Goodness;

ness; which way soever we cast our Eyes, we are encountered with undeniable Instances of the Goodness of God; and every thing that we behold, is a sensible demonstration of it; *the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy work*, says the Psalmist, *Psal. 19. 1.* And again, *Psal. 33. 5. The Earth is full of the Goodness of the Lord.* The whole Frame of this World, and every Creature in it, and all the several degrees of Being and Perfection, which are in the Creatures, and the Providence of God towards them all, in the preservation of them, and providing for the happiness of all of them, in such degrees as they are capable of it, are a plentiful demonstration of the Divine Goodness, which I shall endeavour to illustrate in these *Four* Particulars.

1. The universal Goodness of God appears in giving Being to so many Creatures.

2. In making them all so very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In


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4. In providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.


1. The extent of God's Goodness appears in giving Being to so many Creatures. And this is a pure effect of Goodness, to impart and communicate Being to any thing. Had not God been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all Being to himself, and been unwilling, that any thing besides himself should have been: but his Goodness prompted him to spread and diffuse himself, and set his Power and Wisdom on work, to give Being to all that variety of Creatures, which we see and know to be in the World, and probably to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable, that God could have any other motive to do this, but purely the Goodness of his Nature. All the motives imaginable besides this, must either be indigency and want, or constraint and necessity; but neither of these can have any place in God; and therefore it was *meer Goodness*

ness, that moved him to give Being to other things; and therefore all Creatures have reason, with the four and twenty Elders in the Revelations, to cast their crowns before the throne of God, saying, thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure (that is of thy meer goodness) they are and were created.

(1.) Indigency and Want can have no place in God; because he that hath all possible Perfection, hath all plenty in himself; from whence results All-sufficiency and compleat Happiness. So that the Divine Nature need not look out of it self for Happiness, being incapable of any addition to the Happiness and Perfection it is already possess'd of, *ipsa suis pollens opibus nihil indiga nostri*. We make things for our use, Houses to shelter us, and Cloaths to keep us warm; and we propagate our Kind, to perpetuate our selves in our posterity: But all this supposeth imperfection, and want, and mortality, to none of which the Divine Nature is liable and obnoxious.


C

Nay

 Nay it was not want of glory,
Vol. VII. which made God to make the World.

'Tis true indeed, the glory of God's Goodness doth herein appear, and Creatures endowed with understanding have reason to take notice of it, with thankfulness, praise, and admiration: but there is no happiness redounds to God from it, nor does he feed himself with any imaginary content and satisfaction, such as vain-glorious persons have, from the fluttering applause of their Creatures and Beneficiaries. God is really *above all blessing and praise*. It is great condescension and goodness in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praises, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to sully his great and glorious Name, by taking it into our Mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happiness, to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happiness and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were

were it not for his goodness, might
despise the praises of his Creatures, Vol. VII.
with infinitely more reason than wise
Men do the applause of Fools. There
is indeed one Text of Scripture, which
seems to intimate that God made all
Creatures for himself, as if he had
some need of them, *Prov. 16. 4.*
*The Lord hath made all things for him-
self; yea even the wicked for the day of evil.*
Now if by God's *making all things for
himself*, be meant, that he aimed at
and intended the manifestation of his
Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness in
the Creation of the World, 'tis most
true, that in this sense, *he made all
things for himself*: but if we under-
stand it so, as if the Goodness of his
Nature did not move him thereto,
but he had some design to serve Ends
and Necessities of his own upon his
Creatures, this is far from him. But
it is very probable, that neither of
these are the meaning of this Text,
which may be rendered with much
better sense, and nearer to the He-
brew, thus, *God hath ordained every
thing, to that which is fit for it, and
the wicked hath be ordained for the day*

 of evil; that is, the Wisdom of God
Vol.VII. hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can Necessity and Constraint have any place in God. When there was no Creature yet made, nothing in Being but God himself, there could be nothing to compel him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty: Neither are the Creatures necessary effects and emanations from the Being of God, flowing from the Divine Essence, as water doth from a Spring, and as light streams from the Sun. If so, this indeed would have been an Argument of the *fullness* of the Divine Nature, but not of the *bounty* and *goodness* of it; and it would have been matter of *Joy* to us that we are, but not a true ground of *thankfulness* from us to God; as we rejoyce and are glad that the Sun shines, but we do not give it any thanks for shining, because it shines without any intention or design to do us good; it doth not know that we are the better for its light, nor did it intend

intend we should be, and therefore we have no reason to acknowledge its goodness to us.

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But God, who is a Spirit endowed with Knowledge and Understanding, does not act as natural and material Causes do, which act *necessarily* and *ignorantly*, whereas he acts *knowingly* and *voluntarily*, with particular *intention* and *design*, knowing that he does good, and intending to do so freely and out of choice, and when he hath no other constraint upon him but this, that his goodness enclines his will to communicate himself, and to do good: So that the Divine Nature is under no Necessity, but such as is consistent with the most perfect Liberty and freest Choice.

Not but that Goodness is essential to God, and a necessary Perfection of his Nature, and he cannot possibly be otherwise than good: but when he communicates his goodness, he knows what he does, and wills and chuseth to do so.

And this kind of Necessity is so far from being any impeachment of the

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the

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the Divine Goodness, that it is the great Perfection and praise of it. The Stoick Philosophers mistaking this, do blasphemously advance *their wise and virtuous man* above God himself; for they reason thus, 'A wise man is good out of *choice*, when he may be otherwise; but God out of *necessity of nature*, and when he cannot possibly be otherwise than good. But if they had considered things aright, they might have known, that this is an imperfection in *their wise man*, that he can be otherwise than good; for a power to be evil is impotency and weakness. The highest Character that ever was given of a man, is that which *Velleius Paterculus* gives of *Cato*, that he was *vir bonus, quia aliter esse non potuit*, a good man, because he could not be otherwise; this applied to a mortal Man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but yet it signifies thus much, that it is the highest Perfection, not to be able to be otherwise than good: and this is the Perfection of the Divine Nature, that *goodness is essential to it*, but the expressions and communications of his goodness are spontaneous and

in giving Being to Creatures.

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and free, designed and directed by infinite Knowledge and Wisdom.


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This is the *first*: the *second* particular is, that God hath made all Creatures very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I shall reserve to another opportunity.

C 4 Ser-

in giving Being to Creatures

and free, delighted and directed by it.

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finite Knowledge and Will.

I think the first: the second
is that God is the cause of all
things very good, continuing in
order, and end of them. But
this is not relative to another object.

C 4 Ser-

SERMON II.

The Goodness of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is Good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.

IN the handling of this Argument, I proposed to do these *four* things.
First, To consider what is the proper Notion of Goodness, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, To shew that this Perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, To consider the Effects of the Divine Goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of its objects. And,

Fourthly, To answer some Objections which may seem to contradict, and bring in question the Goodness of God.

I

I have considered the *two* first; and in speaking to the *third*, I proposed the considering these *two* things.

I. The universal extent of God's Goodness, to all his Creatures.

II. More especially the Goodness of God to man, which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The *First* of these appears in these *four* particulars.

1. In his giving Being to so many Creatures.

2. In making them all so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In his providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

The *First* of these I spoke largely to; I proceed to shew in the,

2. Place, that the universal Goodness of God appears, in making all these Creatures so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them.


them. His Goodness excited and set a work his Power to make this World, and all the Creatures in it; and that they might be made in the best manner that could be, his Wisdom directed his Power, *he hath made all things in number, weight, and measure*; so that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another. And that there is an excellent Contrivance in all sorts of Beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole Frame of things, is I think sufficiently visible to every discerning and unprejudiced mind. The lowest form of Creatures, I mean those which are destitute of sense, do all of them contribute some way or other, to the use, and conveniency, and comfort of the Creatures above them, which being endowed with sense are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being so palpable in the greatest part of them, may reasonably be presumed, tho' it be not so discernable concerning all the rest; so that when we survey the whole Creation of God, and the several parts, we may well cry out with David, Psal. 104. 24. *O Lord how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hath thou made them all!*

'Tis

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'Tis true indeed, there are degrees of Perfection in the Creatures, and God is not equally good to all of them. Those Creatures which are of more Noble and Excellent Natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of Perfection, they partake more of his *Goodness*, and are more glorious instances of it: But every Creature partakes of the Divine Goodness in a certain degree, and according to the Nature and Capacity of it. God, if he pleased, could have made nothing but immortal Spirits; and he could have made as many of these as there are individual Creatures of all sorts in the World: but it seemed good to the wise Architect, to make several ranks and orders of Beings, and to display his Power, and Goodness, and Wisdom, in all imaginable variety of Creatures; all which should be good in their kind, tho' far short of the Perfection of Angels and immortal Spirits.

He that will build a House for all the uses and purposes of which a House is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; must not so contrive it, as to make it all

all Rooms of state and entertainment: 
but there must of necessity be in it Vol. VII.
meaner materials, rooms and offices
for several uses and purposes, which
however inferiour to the rest in dignity
and degree, do yet contribute to the
beauty and advantage of the whole. So
in this great Frame of the World, it
was fit there should be variety and
different degrees of Perfection in the
several parts of it; and this is so far
from being an impeachment of the
Wisdom or Goodness of him that made
it, that it is an Evidence of both. For the
meanest of all Gods Creatures is good,
considering the nature and rank of it,
and the end to which it was designed;
and we cannot imagine how it could
have been ordered and framed better,
tho' we can easily tell how it might
have been worse, and that if this or
that had been wanting, or had been
otherwise, it had not been so good;
and those who have been most con-
versant in the contemplation of Na-
ture, and of the Works of God, have
been most ready to make this acknow-
ledgment.

But then if we consider the Crea-
tures of God, with relation to one a-
nother,

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nother, and with regard to the whole Frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithstanding *this* or *that* kind of Creatures, be much less perfect than another; and there be a very great distance between the Perfection of a *worm*, and of an *Angel*; yet considering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the Creation, it is as good as could be, considering its nature and use, and the place allotted to it among the Creatures.

And this difference in the Works of God, between the goodness of the several parts of the Creation, and the excellent and perfect goodness of the whole, the Scripture is very careful to express to us in the History of the Creation, where you find God represented, as first looking upon, and considering every days work by it self, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good, *Gen. 1. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 24.* at the end of every days work, it is said that *God saw it, and it was good*: but then when all was finished, and he surveyed the whole together, it is said, *v. 31.* that *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it*

was very good; very good, that is the best, the Hebrews having no other Superlative. Every Creature of God by it self is *good*: But take the whole together, and they are *very good*, the best that could be. Vol. VII.


3. The universal goodness of God further appears, in the careful and continual preservation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the several Creatures in being, in their natural state and order; those which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preserving the whole World, his managing and governing this vast Frame of things, in such sort, as to keep it from running into confusion and disorder. This is a clear demonstration, no less of the goodness than of the Wisdom and Power of God, that for so many Ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and performed the offices and work for which Nature designed them; that the World is not, in the course of so many thousand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the Frame of things doth

doth not dissolve and fall in pieces.

And the Goodness of God doth not only take care of the main, and support the whole Frame of things, and preserve the more noble and considerable Creatures; but even the least and meanest of them. The Providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor despise any of the works of his hands, so as to let them relapse, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, *Psal. 104. 27, 28.* where the Psalmist speaking of the innumerable multitude of Creatures upon the Earth, and in the Sea, *These all (saith he) wait upon thee, that thou mayst give them their meat in due season; that thou givest them they gather, thou openest thine hand, and they are filled with good.* And to the same purpose, *Psal. 145. 15, 16.* *The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.* The inanimate Creatures, which are without sense; and the brute Creatures, which tho' they have sense, are without

out understanding, and so can have no End and Design of self-preservation, God preserves them, no less than men who are endowed with reason, and foresight to provide for themselves; *Psal. 36. 7. Thou preservest man and beast. And Psal. 147. 9. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young Ravens when they cry.* And so our Saviour declares to us the particular Providence of God towards those Creatures, *Matth. 6. 26. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. V. 28. 29. Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toyl not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.*

And tho' all the Creatures below man, being without understanding, can take no notice of this bounty of God to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it, yet *man*, who is the *Priest* of the visible Creation, and placed here in this great Temple of the World, to offer up Sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, for his universal goodness to all his Creatures, ought to bless God in
D their

Vol. VII.  their behalf, and to sing praises to him, in the name of all the inferiour Creatures, which are subjected to his Dominion and Use; because they are all as it were his Family, his Servants and Utensils, and if God should neglect any of them, and suffer them to perish and miscarry, 'tis we that should find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we should on their behalf celebrate the Praises of God; as we find *David* often does in the *Psalms*, calling upon the inanimate and the brute Creatures to praise the Lord.


4. The universal Goodness of God doth yet further appear; in providing so abundantly for the Welfare and Happiness of all his Creatures, so far as they are capable and sensible of it. He doth not only support and preserve his Creatures in Being, but takes care that they should all enjoy that happiness and pleasure, which their natures are capable of. The Creatures endowed with Sense and Reason, which only are capable of pleasure and happiness, God hath taken care to satisfy the several Appetites and

and Inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as Nature hath enlarged their desires and capacities, so he enlargeth his Bounty towards them; *he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* God doth not immediately bring Meat to the Creatures, when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the Elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted Inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it; and to encourage self-preservation, and to oblige and instigate them to it, and that they might not be melancholy and weary of Life, he hath so ordered the nature of living Creatures, that Hunger and Thirst are most implacable desires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable; and likewise that the satisfaction of these Appetites, should be a mighty pleasure to them. And for those Creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themselves, God hath planted in all Creatures a *συννη*, a natural Affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon seeking Pro-

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visions for them, and cherishing them, with that care and tenderness which their weak and helpless condition doth require; and reason is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpose, than this *natural instinct* is in brute Creatures; which shews what care God hath taken, and what provision he hath made in the natural Frame of all his Creatures, for the satisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the satisfaction whereof is their pleasure and happiness. And thus I have done with the *First* head I proposed, the universal extent of God's goodness to his Creatures, let us now proceed, in the

II. place, To consider more particularly the goodness of God to *men*; which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no further than our own observation and experience, to prove the goodness of God; every day of our lives, *we see and taste that the Lord is good*, all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine goodness, *every good and perfect gift descends from above,*

above, from the Father of lights, Jam. 
1: 17. And the best and most perfect of his gifts he bestows on the Sons of men. What is said of the wisdom of God, Prov. 8. may be applyed to his goodness; the goodness of God shines forth in all the works of Creation, in the Heavens and Clouds above, and in the Fountains of the great deep, in the Earth and the Fields, but *its delight is with the Sons of men*. Such is the goodness of God to man, that it is represented to us in Scripture, under the Notion of love. God is good to all his Creatures, but he is only said to *love the sons of men*. More particularly the goodness of God to man appears,

1. That he hath given us such noble and excellent Beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his Creatures. We owe to him *that* we are, and *what* we are; we do not only partake of that effect of his goodness, which is common to us with all other Creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him, for his more especial goodness, that he

D 3

hath

Whath made us *reasonable* Creatures, of
 Vol. VII. that Kind which we should have chosen to have been of, if we could suppose, that before we were, it had been refer'd to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this visible World. But we did not contrive and chuse this Condition for our selves, we are no ways necessary to the dignity and excellency of our Beings; but God chose this condition for us, and made us what we are; So that we may say, with *David*, *Psal.* 100. 3, 4, 5. *'Tis he that hath made us, and not we our selves. O enter then into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name, for the Lord is good.* The goodness of God is the Spring and Fountain of our Beings, but for *that* we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodness, we might have been any thing, of the lowest and meanest rank of his Creatures. But the goodness of God hath been pleased to advance us to be the Top and Perfection of the visible Creation, he hath been pleased to endow us with Mind and Understanding, and made us capable of happiness, in the know-

knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of himself. He hath curiously and wonderfully wrought the Frame of our Bodies, so as to make them fit Habitations for reasonable Souls, and immortal Spirits; he hath made our very Bodies Vessels of Honour, when of the very same Clay he hath made innumerable other Creatures, of a much lower rank and condition; so that tho' man in respect of his Body be a-kin to the Earth, yet in regard of his Soul, he is allied to Heaven, of a divine Original, and descended from above. Of all the Creatures in this visible World, man is the chief; and what is said of *Behemoth*, or the Elephant, *Job* 42. in respect of his great strength, and the vast bigness of his Body, is only true absolutely of man, that he is, *divini opificii caput*, the chief of the ways of God, and upon earth there is none like him.

The Psalmist takes particular notice of the goodness of God to man, in this respect of the excellency and dignity of his being. *Psal.* 8. 5. *Thou hast made him little lower than the Angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.* And this advantage of our na-

ture above other Creatures, we ought
 Vol. VII. thankfully to acknowledge; tho' most
 men are so stupid, as to overlook it,
 as *Elihu* complains, *Job 35. 10, 11.*
None saith, where is God my maker? Who
teacheth us more than the beasts of the
earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls
of heaven.

2. The goodness of God to *man* ap-
 pears, in that he hath made and or-
 dained so many things chiefly for our
 use. The beauty and usefulness of the
 Creatures below us, their plain sub-
 serviency to our necessity, and bene-
 fit, and delight, are so many clear
 Evidences of the Divine Goodness to
 us, not only discernable to our Reason,
 but even palpable to our Senses, so
 that we may see and taste that the
 Lord is gracious.

This *David* particularly insists up-
 on as a special ground of praise and
 thanksgiving to God, that he hath
 subjected so great a part of the Crea-
 tion to our dominion and use; *Psal.*
8. 6, 7, 8. speaking of man, *Thou*
hast made him to have dominion o-
ver the works of thy hands; thou
hast put all things under his feet; all
sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the
the

the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

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What an innumerable variety of Creatures are there in this inferiour World, which were either solely or principally made for the use and service, pleasure and delight of man! How many things are there, which serve for the necessity and support, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreshment and delight of our Senses, and the exercise and employment of our Understandings! That God hath not made man for the service of other Creatures, but other Creatures for the service of man, *Epictetus* doth very ingeniously argue from this observation; that the Creatures below man, the brute beasts, have all things in a readiness, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging, so that they have no absolute need that any should build Houses, or make Cloaths, or store up Provisions, or prepare and dress meat for them; *for, says he, being made for the service of another, they ought to be furnished with these things, that they may be always in a readiness, to serve their*

Vol. VII. *their Lord and master; a plain evidence that they were made to serve man, and not man to serve them.*

And to raise our thoughts of God's goodness to us the Sons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the Creatures *below* us for our use and convenience, so hath he appointed the Creatures *above* us for our Guard and Protection, not to say for our service. Psal. 34. 7. *The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and he delivereth them; and then it follows, O taste and see that the Lord is good. And, Psal. 91. 11, 12. He shall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands.* Nay the Apostle speaks, as if their whole business and imployment were to attend upon and be serviceable to good men, Heb. 1. 14. *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of Salvation?*

3. The goodness of God to *men* appears, in his tender Love and peculiar Care of us, above the rest of the Creatures, being ready to impart and dispense to us the good that is suitable to our capacity and condition; and

and concerned to exempt us from those manifold Evils of Want and Pain, to which we are obnoxious. I do not mean an absolute exemption from all sorts and all degrees of Evil, and a perpetual tenor of temporal happiness, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not suitable to our present state, and the rank and order which we are in among the Creatures; nor would it be best for us, all things considered. But the Goodness of God to us above other Creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our Natures above them; for as the Apostle reasons in another case, *doth God take care for Oxen*, and shall he not much more extend his care to Man? To this purpose our Saviour reasons, *Mat. 6. Behold the Fowls of the Air, they sow not, neither do they reap, and yet your heavenly Father takes care of them; are not ye much better than they?* And, v. 30. *Wherefore if God so cloath the grass of the field, shall he not much more cloath you?* And, Chap. 10. 29. *Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbred. Fear ye not there-*

Vol. VII. *therefore, ye are of more value than many Sparrows.* 'Tis true, God hath a special care of his People and Servants, above the rest of Mankind ; but our Saviour useth these Arguments to his Disciples, to convince them of the Providence of God towards them, as *Men*, and of a more excellent Nature than other Creatures.

And indeed we are born into the World more destitute and helpless, than other Creatures ; as if it were on purpose to shew, that God had reserved us for his more peculiar Care and Providence ; which is so great, that the Scripture, by way of condescension, expresseth it to us by the name of *Love* ; so that what effects of Care the greatest and tenderest Affection in Men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of God's Goodness to us ; and this Affection of God is common to all Men (tho' of all Creatures we have least deserved it) and is ready to diffuse and shed abroad it self, wherever Men are qualified for it by Duty and Obedience, and do not obstruct and stop the emanations of it, by their Sins and Provocations.

And

And tho' the greatest part of Mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a stop to his goodness, tho' it cause many abatements of it, and hinder many good things from us; but such is the Goodness of God, notwithstanding the evil and undutifulness of Men, that he is pleased still to concern himself in the Government of the World, and to preserve the Societies of Men from running into utter confusion and disorder; notwithstanding the violence and irregularities of Mens Wills and Passions, the Communities of Men subsist upon tolerable terms; and notwithstanding the rage and craft of evil Men, poor and unarmed Innocence and Virtue is usually protected, and sometimes rewarded in this World; and domineering and outrageous Wickedness is very often remarkably checkt and chastised. All which Instances of God's Providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of Mankind, so are they an effectual declaration of that Goodness which governs all things, and of God's kind care of the affairs and concerns of Men; so that if we look no farther than this World, we may say

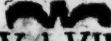
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M say with David, *Verily there is a reward for the Righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.*

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I know this Argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpose; that if goodness govern'd the World, and administr'd the Affairs of it, good and evil would not be so carelessly and promiscuously dispensed; good Men would not be so great sufferers, nor wicked Men so prosperous as many times they are.

But this also, if rightly considered, is an Effect of God's goodness, and infinite *Patience* to Mankind; That he causeth his Sun to rise, and his Rain to fall upon the just and unjust. That upon the Provocations of Men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confusion and ruin; this plainly shews, that he designs this Life for the tryal of Men's Virtue and Obedience, in order to the greater reward of it; and therefore he suffers Men to walk in their own ways, without any great check and controule, and reserves the main bulk of Rewards and Punishments for another World: So that all this is so far from being any Objection against the goodness of God,

God, that on the contrary, it is an  Argument of God's immense Goodness, and infinite *Patience*, that the World subsists and continues, and that he permits Men to take their course, for the fuller tryal of them, and the clearer and most effectual declaration of his Justice, in the Rewards and Punishments of another life.

Fourthly, and Lastly, The Goodness of God to Mankind most gloriously appears, in the provision he hath made for our *Eternal Happiness*. What the happiness of Man should have been, had he continued in Innocency, is not particularly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by willful transgression, we have forfeited all that happiness which our Natures are capable of. In this lapsed and ruinous condition of Mankind, the Goodness and Mercy of God was pleased to employ his Wisdom for our Recovery, and to restore us, not only to a new, but a greater capacity of *Glory* and *Happiness*. And in order to this, the Son of God assumes our Nature, for the recovery and redemption of Man; and the pardon of Sin is purchased for us by his Blood; *Eternal*

The goodness of God to Man,
nal Life, and the Way to it, are
 Vol. VII. clearly discover'd to us. God is pleas-
 ed to enter into a New and better
 Covenant with us, and to afford us
 inward grace and assistance, to en-
 able us to perform the Conditions of
 it; and graciously to accept of our
Faith and Repentance, of our sincere
 Resolutions and Endeavours of Holi-
 ness and Obedience, for *Perfect* and
Compleat Righteousness, for his sake
 who *fullfilled all righteousness*.

This is the great and amazing
goodness of God to Mankind, that
 when we were in open Rebellion a-
 gainst him, he should entertain
 thoughts of Peace and Reconciliation;
 and when he past by the fall'n An-
 gels, he should set his Affection and
 Love upon the sinful and miserable
 Sons of Men. And *herein is the love*
of God to men perfected, that as he
 hath made all Creatures, both above
 us, and below us, subservient and
 instrumental to our subsistence and
 preservation, so, for the ransom of
 our Souls from eternal Ruin and Mi-
 sery, *he hath not spared his own Son,*
but hath given him up to death for us;
 him, whom *he hath commanded all the*
 ¶ *Angels*

in his provision for eternal Happiness. 49

Angels of God to worship, and to whom he hath made subject all Creatures in Heaven and Earth; Him, who made the World, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, who is the brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person. Vol. VII

And after such a stupendious Instance as this, what may we not reasonably hope for, and promise our selves from the Divine Goodness! So the Apostle hath taught us to reason, *Rom. 8. 32. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

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SERMON III.

The Goodness of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is Good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.

IN handling this Argument, I proceeded in this Method.

First, To consider what is the proper Notion of Goodness.

Secondly, To shew that this Perfection of Goodness belongs to God.

Thirdly, I considered the Effects of the Divine Goodness under these Heads.

I. The universal Extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and design of the things created by him, and his preservation and providing for the welfare and happiness of them.

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II.

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II. I considered more particularly the Goodness of God *to Mankind*, of which I gave these four Instances.

1. That he hath given us such noble Beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his Creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciseth so peculiar a Providence over us above the rest, that tho he is said *to be good to all*, he is only said *to love the Sons of Men*.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal Life and Happiness. There only now remains the

Fourth and last particular to be spoken to, which was to answer some Objections which may seem to contradict and bring in question the Goodness of God ; and they are many, and have (some of them especially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great consideration and care, to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of ; the Goodness of God being one of the most certain and unquestionable Truths in the World. I shall mention those which are most con-

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considerable and obvious, and do almost of themselves spring up in every Man's Mind, and they are these *Four*, the *first* of them more general, the other *three* more particular.

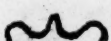
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First, If God be so exceeding good, whence comes it to pass, that there is so much Evil in the World, of several kinds; Evil of Imperfection, Evil of Affliction or Suffering, and (which is the greatest of all others, and indeed the cause of them) Evil of Sin?

Secondly, The Doctrine of *absolute Reprobation*; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greatest part of Mankind to eternal Misery and Torment, without any consideration or respect to their Sin or Fault; this seems notoriously to contradict; not only the Notion of infinite Goodness, but any competent measure and degree of Goodness.

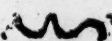
Thirdly, The eternal Misery and Punishment of Men for temporal Faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of Goodness, which we suppose to be in God.

Fourthly, The Instances of God's great severity to Mankind upon occasion, in those great Calamities, which

Vol.VII.  by the Providence of God have in several Ages either befallen Mankind in general, or particular Nations; and here I shall confine my self to Scripture Instances, as being the most certain and remarkable, or at least equal to any that are to be met with in History; as the early and universal degeneracy of Mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first Parents; the destruction of the World by a general Deluge; the sudden and terrible destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the Cities about them, by Fire and Brimstone from Heaven; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the express command of God; and lastly, the great Calamities which befel the Jewish Nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the destruction of *Jerusalem*.

These are the Objections against the goodness of God, which I shall severally consider, and with all the brevity and clearness I can, endeavour to return a particular Answer to them.

The *First* Objection, which I told you is more general, is this, If God be so exceeding Good, whence then comes it to pass, that there is so much Evil

Evil in the World of several kinds ? 
 'Tis evident beyond denyal, that E. Vol. VII
 vil abounds in the World. *The whole World lies in Evil*, says St. John, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *lies in wickedness*, (so our Translation renders it) is involved in Sin ; but by the article and opposition St. John seems to intend *the Devil*. *We know*, says he, *that we are of God, and the whole World*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *is subject to the evil one*, and under his power and dominion. Which way so ever we render it, it signifies, that Evil of one kind or other reigns in the World. Now can Evil come from a Good God ? *Out of the same Mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. Doth a Fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter ? This cannot be*, as St. James speaks in another case. But all Evils that are in the World, must either be directly *procured* by the Divine Providence, or *permitted* to happen ; and next to the *causing* and *procuring* of Evil, it seems to be contrary to the Goodness of God, to *permit* that there should be any such thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

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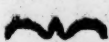
Answer. To give an account of this, it was an ancient Doctrine of some of the most ancient Nations, that there were two first Causes or Principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad ; which among the *Persians* were called *Oromasdes* and *Arimanius* ; among the *Egyptians* *Osiris* and *Typhon* ; among the *Chaldeans* good or bad Planets ; among the *Greeks*, *Zeus* and *Adys* ; and *Plutarch* expressly says, That the good Principle was called *God*, and the bad, *Demon*, or *the Devil* ; in conformity to which ancient Traditions, the *Manichees* (a sad Sect of Christians) set up two Principles, the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all good that is in the World ; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the World.

But besides that the Notion of an infinite Evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpose to suppose two opposite Principles of equal power and force. That the very Notion of an infinite Evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we consider, that what is infinitely evil, must be infinitely

nitely imperfect, and consequently infinitely weak ; and for that reason, tho never so mischievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and foolish, would neither be in a capacity to contrive Mischief, nor to execute it. But admit, that a Being infinitely mischievous, were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerful, yet it could do no evil ; because the opposite Principle of infinite Goodness, being also infinitely wise and powerful, they would tie up one anothers Hands ; so that upon this supposition, the Notion of a Deity, would signifie just nothing, and by virtue of the eternal opposition and equality of these two Principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual Bay , and being an equal match for one another, instead of being two Deities, they would be two Idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

But to return a more distinct and satisfactory Answer to this Objection ; there are *three* sorts of Evil in the World ; the Evil of Imperfection ; the Evil of Affliction and Suffering ; and the Evil of Sin.

And *1st*, For the Evil of Imperfection,
on,


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on, I mean natural Imperfections, these are not simply and absolutely, but only comparatively evil ; now comparative Evil is but a less degree of goodness ; and it is not at all inconsistent with the goodness of God, that some Creatures should be less good than others, that is, imperfect in comparison of them ; nay, it is very agreeable both to the Goodness and Wisdom of God, that there should be this variety in the Creatures, and that they should be of several degrees of Perfection, being made for several Uses and Purposes, and to be subservient to one another, provided they all contribute to the Harmony and Beauty of the whole.

Some Imperfection is necessarily involved in the very nature and condition of a Creature, as that it derives its Being from another, and necessarily depends upon it, and is beholding to it, and is likewise of necessity finite and limited in its Nature and Perfections ; and as for those Creatures which are less perfect than others, this also, that there should be degrees of Perfection, is necessary, upon supposition, that the Wisdom of God thinks fit to
dis-

display it self in variety of Creatures of several kinds and ranks. For tho

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comparing the Creatures with one another, the Angelical Nature is best, and most perfect; yet it is absolutely best, that there should be other Creatures besides Angels. There are many parts of the Creation, which are rashly and inconsiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as some noxious and hurtful Creatures; which yet in other respects, and to some purposes, may be very useful, and against the harm and mischief whereof, we are sufficiently armed, by such means of defence, and such antidotes as reason and experience are able to find and furnish us withal; and those parts of the World, which we think of little or no use, as Rocks and Deserts, and that vast Wilderness of the Sea, if we consider things well, are of great use to several very considerable purposes; or if we can discern no other use of them, they serve at least to help our dulness, and to make us more attentively to consider, and to admire the perfection and usefulness of the rest; at the worst, they may serve for Foils to set off the wise

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order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expresth it very well) they may be like a Blackmoor's Head in a Picture, which gives the greater Beauty to the whole Piece.

2^{dly}, For the Evils of Affliction and Suffering ; and these either befall brute Creatures, or Men endow'd with Reason and Consideration.

1st, For those which befall the brute Creatures ; those sufferings which Nature inflicts upon them, are very few ; the greatest they meet withal are from Men, or upon their account, for whose sake they were chiefly made, and to whose reasonable use and gentle dominion they are consigned.

It is necessary from the very nature of these Creatures, that they should be passive and liable to pain : and yet it doth in no wise contradict either the Wisdom or Goodness of God to make such Creatures, because all these pains are for the most part fully recompensed, by the pleasure these Creatures find in Life ; and that they have such a pleasure and happiness in Life, is evident, in that all Creatures, notwithstanding the miseries they endure, are still fond of Life, and unwilling to part with

with it : no Creature but Man  Vol. VII.
(who only hath perverted his Nature) ever seeks the destruction of it self; and since all brute Creatures are so loth to go out of Being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate, whether they would be or not, they would chuse to come into Being, even upon these hard conditions.

But however that be, this we are sure of, that they suffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we who are their natural Lords, having depraved our selves first, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the Scripture tells us, that they suffer for our sakes, and that *the whole Creation groaneth, and is in bondage* for the sin of Man: And this is not unreasonable, that being made principally for Man, they should suffer upon his account, as a part of his Goods and Estate; not as a punishment to them (which under the notion of *punishment*, they are not capable of) but as a punishment to him, who is the Lord and Owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and less useful and serviceable to him for whom they

they were made ; so that the suffer-
 Vol. VII. ings of the Creatures below us, are
 in a great measure to be charged up-
 us, under whose dominion God hath
 put them.

2dly, As for the Afflictions and Suf-
 ferings which befall Men, these are
 not natural and of God's making, but
 the result and fruit of our own doings,
 the effects and consequences of the ill
 use of our own liberty and free choice ;
 and God does not willingly send them
 upon us, but we wilfully pull them
 down upon our selves ; For *he doth not
 afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of
 men*, as the Prophet tells us, *Lam. 3.*
33. Or as it is in the *Wisdom of Solo-*
mon, Chap. 1. 12, 13. *God made not
 death, neither hath he pleasure in the de-*
struction of the living ; but men pull de-
struction upon themselves, with the works
of their own hands. All the Evils that
 are in the World, are either the Ef-
 fects of our own Sin, as Poverty, and
 Disgrace, Pains, Diseases, and Death,
 which are sometimes more immedi-
 ately inflicted upon Men, by a visi-
 ble Providence and hand of God, but
 are usually brought upon us by our
 selves, in the natural course and order
 of

of things ; or they are the Effects of other Mens sins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetousness, by the malice and cruelty of others ; and these Evils, tho they are procured and caused by others, yet they are deserved by our selves ; and tho they are immediately from the Hand of Men, yet we ought to look farther, and consider them, as directed and disposed by the Providence of God ; as *David* did when *Shimei* cursed him ; *God* (saith he) *hath bid him curse David*, tho it immediately proceeded from *Shimei's* insolence and ill nature.

Now upon the supposition of Sin, the Evils of Affliction and Suffering are good, because they are of great use to us, and serve to very good ends and purposes.

I. As they are the proper Punishments of Sin. Evil is good to them that do Evil, that is, it is fit and proper, just and due. *Psal. 107. 17. Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.* And it is fit they should be so, crooked to crooked is streight and right. *A rod for the back of Fools*, saith *Solomon* ; and elsewhere, *God hath made every thing*

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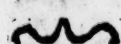
Vol. VII. **M** thing for that which is fit for it, and the
evil day for the wicked man.

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater Evils. Evils of Affliction and Suffering are good for wicked Men, to bring them to a sense of their sin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal Evils, and preserve them from eternal Misery; and not only good to the Person that suffers, but likewise to others, to deter and affright them from the like sins; to prevent the contagion of Sin, and to stop the progress of Iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worse mischiefs might ensue; and they are good to good Men, to awaken and rouse them out of their security, to make them know God and themselves better; they are almost a necessary Discipline for the best of Men, much more for evil and depraved dispositions; and we might as reasonably expect, that there should be no Rod in a School, as that there should be no suffering and afflictions in the World.

3dly, As they are the occasions and matter of many Virtues. God teacheth Men temperance by want, and patience

tience by reproach and sufferings, charity by persecution, and pity and compassion to others by grievous pains upon our selves. The benefit of Afflictions to them that make a wise use of them is unspeakable; they are grievous in themselves, *nevertheless* (saith the Apostle to the Hebrews) *they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them that are exercised therewith.* David gives a great testimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience, *Psal. 119. 76. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word. And, v. 71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.*

4thly, The Evils of Suffering, patiently submitted to, and decently born, do greatly contribute to the increase of our happiness. All the persecutions and sufferings of good Men in this life, *do work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And if they contribute to our greater good and happiness at last, they are good. The glorious reward of the Sufferings which we have met with, in this life, will in the next clear up the goodness
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 Vol. VII. and justice of the Divine Providence, from all those Mists and Clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from all those Objections which are now raised against it, upon account of the afflictions and sufferings of good Men in this life, which *are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them.*

III. As for the Evil of Sin, which is the great difficulty of all. How is it consistent with the goodness of God, to permit so great an Evil as this to come into the World? For answer to this, I desire these *two* things may be considered.

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wisdom or goodness of God, to make a Creature of such a frame, as to be capable of having its obedience tryed in order to the reward of it, which could not be, unless such a Creature were made mutable, and by the good or bad use of its liberty, capable of obeying or disobeying the Laws of his Creator; for where there is no possibility of sinning, there can be no tryal of our Virtue and Obedience, and nothing but Virtue and Obedience are capable of reward.

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The goodness of God towards us is sufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happiness, and gave us sufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wise contradict his goodness, that he does not by his Omnipotency interpose to prevent our sin; for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let Man be the Creature he made him, capable of reward or punishment, according to the good or bad use of his own free choice. It is sufficient that God made Man good at first, tho mutable, and that he had a power to have continued so, tho he wilfully determined himself to evil; this acquits the goodness of God, that *he made Man upright, but he found out to himself many inventions.*

2. If there had not been such an order and rank of Creatures, as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifestation of God's goodness in a way of mercy and patience; so that tho God be not the Author of the sins of Men, yet in case of their willful transgression, and disobedience, the goodness of God hath a fair opportunity of discovering

Vol. VII. vering it self, in his patience and long-suffering to Sinners, and in his merciful care and provision for their recovery out of that miserable state. And this may suffice for answer to the *first* Objection, if God be so good, whence then comes evil?

The *Second* Objection against the Goodness of God, is from the Doctrine of *absolute reprobation*; by which I mean the decreeing the greatest part of Mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin and fault. This seems not only notoriously to contradict the Notion of infinite Goodness, but to be utterly inconsistent with the least measure and degree of Goodness. Indeed, if by *reprobation* were only meant, that God in his own infinite Knowledge foresees the sins and wickedness of Men, and hath from all eternity determined in himself, what in his Word he hath so plainly declared, that he will punish impenitent Sinners with everlasting destruction; or if by *reprobation* be meant, that God hath not elected all Mankind, that is, absolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to Salvation; neither of these

these Notions of *reprobation*, is any ways inconsistent with the goodness of God; for he may foresee the wickedness of Men, and determine to punish it, without any impeachment of his goodness: He may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the same degree; if God please to bring any *infallibly* to Salvation, this is transcendent goodness; but if he put all others into a *capacity* of it, and use *all necessary and fitting means* to make them happy, and after all this, any fall short of happiness, through their own wilful fault and obstinacy, these Men are evil and cruel to themselves, but God hath been very *good* and merciful to them.

But if by *reprobation* be meant, either that God hath decreed, without respect to the *fin*s of Men, their absolute ruin and misery; or that he hath decreed that they shall inevitably sin and perish; it cannot be denied, but that such a *reprobation* as this doth clearly overthrow all possible Notion of goodness. I have told you, that the true and only Notion of *goodness* in God, is this, that it is a *propension and disposition* of the *Divine Nature*, to communicate

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Being and Happiness to his Creatures : But surely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a *disposition to make them happy*, than an *absolute decree*, and a *peremptory resolution to make them miserable*. God is infinitely better than the best of Men, and yet none can possibly think *that* Man a good Man, who should absolutely resolve to disinherit and destroy his Children, without the foresight and consideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the Goodness of God : But it is not an easie matter, to devise to say any thing worse than this of the Devil.

But it is said, *reprobation* is an act of *soveraignty* in God, and therefore not to be measured by the common rules of *goodness*. But it is *contrary* to goodness, and plainly *inconsistent* with it ; and we must not attribute such a *soveraignty* to God, as contradicts his *goodness* ; for if the *soveraignty* of God may break in at pleasure upon his other Attributes, then it signifies nothing to say that God is *good*, and *wise*, and *just*, if his *soveraignty* may at any time act contrary to these Perfections.

Now if the Doctrine of *absolute reprobation*, and the *goodness* of God cannot

not possibly stand together, the Question is, Which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. Paul determines in another case, concerning the *truth* and *fidelity* of God, will equally hold concerning his *goodness*;

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Let God be good, and every Man a liar. The Doctrine of *absolute reprobation* is no part of the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the Rule of our Faith. If some great Divines have held this Doctrine, not in opposition to the goodness of God, but hoping they might be recenciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the Schools of the greatest Divines be call'd in question, than the *goodness* of God, which next to his *Being*, is the greatest and clearest truth in the world.

Thirdly, It is farther objected, that the eternal punishment of Men for temporal Faults seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of Goodness, which we suppose to be in God.

This Objection I have fully answer'd, in a Discourse upon S. *Matth.* 25. 46. and therefore shall proceed to the

Fourth and last Objection, against the *goodness* of God, from sundry Instances of God's severity to Mankind,


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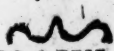
in those great Calamities which by the Providence of God have in several Ages either befallen Mankind in general, or particular Nations.

And here I shall confine my self to Scripture Instances, as being most known, and most certain and remarkable, or at least equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other History; such are the early and universal degeneracy of all Mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first Parents; the destruction of the World by a general deluge; the sudden and terrible destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the Cities about them, by Fire and Brimstone from Heaven; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites* by the express command of God; and lastly, the great Calamities which befel the Jewish Nation, especially the final ruin and dispersion of them at the destruction of *Jerusalem*. These and the like instances of God's severity, seem to call in question his goodness.

Against these severe and dreadful Instances of God's severity, it might be a sufficient vindication of his goodness, to say in general, that they were
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all upon great and high Provocations ; most of them after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readiness in God to have prevented or removed them upon repentance ; all which are great Instances of the goodness of God. But yet for the clearer manifestation of the *Divine Goodness*, I shall consider them particularly , and as briefly as I can.

1. As for the transgression of our first Parents, and the dismal consequences of it to all their Posterity. This is a great depth, and tho the Scripture mentions it, yet it speaks but little of it ; and in matters of mere Revelation, we must not attempt to be *wise above what is written*. Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful Disobedience, to a very plain and easie Command ; and that in the punishment of it, God mitigated the extremity of the Sentence (which was present death) by granting our first Parents the Reprieve of almost a thousand Years ; and, as to the consequences of it to their Posterity, God did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of Mankind ; and tho he removed

 moved them out of that happy state
 Vol. VII. and place in which Man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon Earth; and which is certainly the most glorious Instance of Divine Goodness that ever was, he was pleased to make the fall and misery of Man the happy occasion of sending his Son in our Nature, for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition, than that from which we fell. So the Apostle tells us at large, *Rom. 5.* That the Grace of God, by Jesus Christ, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than the sin and disobedience of our first Parents did to our prejudice.

2. For the general Deluge, tho it look very severe, yet if we consider it well, we may plainly discern much of goodness in it. It was upon great provocation, by the universal corruption and depravation of Mankind, *The earth was filled with violence, and all flesh had corrupted its ways; the wickedness of Man was great upon the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually; which is not*

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a description of *original* sin, but of the *actual* and *improved* wickedness of Mankind ; and yet when the wickedness of Men was come to this height, God gave them fair warning, before he brought this Calamity upon them, *when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, for the space of an hundred and twenty Years ;* at last, when nothing would reclaim them, and almost the whole race of Mankind were become so very bad, that it is said, *it repented the Lord that he had made Man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart,* when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue so ; God in pity to Mankind, and to put a stop to their growing wickedness and guilt, swept them away all at once, from the face of the Earth, except one Family, which he had preserved from this Contagion, to be a new Seminary of Mankind, and, as the Heathen Poet expresseth it, *Mundi melioris origo, the source and original of a better Race.*

3. For that terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by Fire and Brimstone from Heaven, it was not brought upon them till *the cry of their sin was great,*

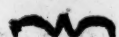
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great, and gone up to Heaven, till by their unnatural Lusts they had provoked supernatural Vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms God was pleased to condescend to *Abraham* for the sparing of them; if in those *five* Cities there had been found *but ten righteous persons*, he would not have destroyed them for those *ten's* sake. So that we may say with the Apostle, *Behold the goodness and severity of God!* Here was wonderful goodness mixt with this great severity.

4. For the extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the express command of God, which hath such an appearance of severity, it is to be consider'd, that this Vengeance was not executed upon them, till they were grown ripe for it. God spared them for above four hundred Years, for so long their growing Impiety is taken notice of, *Gen. 18. 28.* where it is said, That *the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full*; God did not proceed to cut them off, till their case was desperate, past all hopes of recovery, till *the land was defiled with abominations*, and furcharged with wickedness, to that degree, as to *spue out its Inhabitants*, as is expressly

pressly said, *Levit.* 18. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to spare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and misery to themselves.

Fifthly, and Lastly, As for the great Calamities which God brought upon the *Jews*, especially in their final ruin and dispersion, at the destruction of *Jerusalem*; not to insist upon the known History of their multiplied Rebellions and Provocations, of their despiteful usage of God's Prophets, whom he sent to warn them of his Judgments, and to call them to Repentance, of their obstinate refusal to receive Correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that God could use; for all which Provocations, he at last delivered them into their Enemies hands, to carry them away Captive; not to insist upon this, I shall only consider their final destruction by the *Romans*, which tho' it be dreadfully severe, beyond any Example of History, yet the Provocation was proportionable; for this Vengeance did not come upon them, till they had as it were extorted it, by the most obstinate impenitency and unbelief, in *rejecting the Coun-*
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sel of God against themselves, and resisting such means as would have brought Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah to repentance; till they had despised the Doctrine of Life and Salvation, delivered to them by the Son of God, and confirmed from Heaven, by the clearest and greatest Miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and slain the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World. Nay, even after this greatest of sins that ever was committed, God waited for their Repentance forty Years, to see if in that time they would be brought to a sense of their sins, and to know the things which belonged to their peace. And no wonder if after such provocations, and so much patience, and so obstinate an impenitency, the goodness of God at last gave way to his justice, and wrath came upon them to the utmost.

So that all these Instances rightly considered, are rather *commendations* of the Divine Goodness, than just and reasonable *objections* against it; and notwithstanding the severity of them, it is evident that God is good, from the *primary inclinations of his nature*; and severe only upon necessity, and in case of
just

just provocation. And to be otherwise, not to punish insolent Impiety and incorrigible Wickedness, in a severe and remarkable manner, would not be *goodness*, but a *fond indulgence*; not *patience*, but *stupidity*; not *mercy* to Mankind, but *cruelty*; because it would be an encouragement to them to do more mischief, and to bring greater misery upon themselves.

So that if we suppose God to be *holy* and *just*, as well as *good*, there is nothing in any of these Instances, but what is very consistent with all that goodness which we can suppose to be in a *holy*, and *wise*, and *just Governour*, who is a declared Enemy to Sin, and is resolved to give all fitting discountenance to the breach and violation of his Laws. It is necessary in kindness and compassion to the rest of Mankind, that some should be made remarkable Instances of God's severity, that the punishment of a few may be a warning to all, *that they may hear and fear*, and by avoiding the like sins, may prevent the like severity upon themselves.

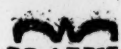
And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the

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good-

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80 *The goodness of God consistent with, &c.*

 *goodness of God; the consideration*
Vol. VII. *whereof is fruitful of many excellent and useful Inferences, in relation both to our Comfort and our Duty. But these I shall refer to another opportunity.*

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SERMON IV.

The Goodness of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is Good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.

I Have made several Discourses upon this Argument, of the *goodness* of God ; shewing what it is ; on what accounts we ascribe it to God ; what are the Effects and large extent of it to the whole Creation, and more particularly to Mankind ; and, in the last place, considered the several Objections which seem to lie against it. I proceed now to the Application of this excellent Argument, the consideration whereof is so fruitful of useful Inferences, in relation both to our Comfort and Duty. And,

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I. This

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I. This shews us the prodigious folly and unreasonableness of Atheism. Most of the Atheism that is in the World, doth not so much consist in a firm perswasion that there is no God, as in vain wishes and desires that there were none. Bad Men think it would be a happiness to them, and that they should be in a much better condition, if there were no God, than if there be one. *Nemo deum non esse credit, nisi cui deum non esse expedit, no Man is apt to disbelieve a God, but he whose Interest it is that there should be none.* And if we could see into the Hearts of wicked Men, we should find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a God, he is just and will punish sin, that he is infinite in power and not to be resisted, and therefore kills them with his terror so often as they think of him; hence they apprehend it their interest, that there should be no God, and wish there were none, and thence are apt to cherish in their Minds a vain hope that there is none, and at last endeavour to impose upon themselves by vain reasonings, and to suppress the belief of a God, and to stifle their natural

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apprehensions and fears of him. So *Vol. VII.*
that it is not *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, fear that first made Gods; but the fear which bad Men have of the Divine Power and Justice, that first tempted them to the disbelief of him.

But were not these Men as foolish as they are wicked, they would wish with all their Hearts there were a God, and be glad to believe so. And the Psalmist gives them their true Character, who can entertain any such thoughts or wishes; *Psal. 14. 1. The Fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*; for they are *Fools* who do not understand nor consult their true Interest: And if this be true which I have said concerning the *goodness* of God, if this be his Nature, to desire and procure the happiness of his Creatures, whoever understands the true Nature of God and his own true Interest, cannot but wish there were a God, and be glad of any Argument to prove it, and rejoyce to find it true, as Children are glad of a kind and tender Father, and as Subjects rejoyce in a wise and good Prince.

The *goodness* of God gives us so lovely a Character of him, makes him so



 good a Father, so gracious a Governour of Men, that if there were no such Being in the World, it were infinitely desirable to Mankind that there should be ; he is such an one, *qualem omnes cuperent, si deesset, as if he were wanting, all Men ought to wish for.* The Being of God is so comfortable, so convenient, so necessary to the felicity of Mankind, that (as Tully admirably says) *Dij immortales ad usum hominum fabricati penè videantur*, if God were not a necessary Being of himself, he might almost seem to be made on purpose for the use and benefit of Men ; so that Atheism is not only an Instance of the most horrible Impiety, but of the greatest Stupidity ; and for Men to glory in their disbelief of a God, is like the rejoycing and triumph of a furious and besotted multitude, in the Murder of a wise and good Prince, the greatest calamity and confusion that could possibly have befallen them.


If the Evidence of God's being were not so clear as it is, yet the consideration of his *goodness* ought to check all inclination to Atheism and Infidelity ; for if he be as *good* as he is represented to us, both by natural Light and

and divine Revelation, (and he is so, as sure as he is) if he tender our Welfare, and desire our Happiness, as much as we our selves can do, and use all wise ways and proper means to bring it about, then it is plainly every man's Interest, even thine, O sinner! to whom after all thy Provocations he is willing to be reconciled, that there should be such a Being as God is, and when ever thou comest to thy self, thou wilt be sensible of thy want of him, and thy soul will thirst for God, even the living God, and pant after him; as the hart pants after the water brooks; in the day of thy Affliction and Calamity, when distress and anguish cometh upon thee, thou wilt flie to God for Refuge, and shelter thy self under his Protection, and wouldest not for all the World, but there were such a Being in it, to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo sanus timet* (says Seneca) *furor est metuere salutaria*, no man in his wits is afraid there is a God; it is a madness to fear that, which is so much for our benefit and advantage. Humane Nature is conscious to it self of its own weakness and insufficiency, and of its necessary dependance upon something

Vol. VII. without it self for its Happiness, and therefore in great Extremity and Distress, the Atheist himself hath naturally recourse to him, and he who denyed and rejected him in his Prosperity, clings to him in adversity, as his *only support and present help in time of trouble*. And this is a sure Indication, that these men, after all their endeavours to impose upon themselves, have not been able wholly to extinguish in their Minds the belief of God and his Goodness; nay it is a sign, that at the bottom of their Hearts they have a firm perswasion of his *goodness*, when after all their insolent defiance of him, they have the Confidence to apply themselves to him for *mercy, and help in time of need*; and therefore our Hearts ought to rise with indignation against those who go about to perswade the belief of a thing so prejudicial to our Interest, to take away *the Light of our eyes, and the Breath of our nostrils*, and to rob us of all the Comfort and Support, which the belief of an infinite Power, conducted by infinite Wisdom and Goodness, is apt to afford to Mankind.

II. We

II. We should take great care of  Vol. VII.
 perverting and abusing this great good-
ness by vain Confidence and Presump-
 tion. This is a Provocation of an high
 Nature, which the Scripture calls,
turning the grace of God into wantonness,
 making that an encouragement to Sin,
 which is one of the strongest Argu-
 ments in the world against it. God is
 infinitely good and *merciful*; but we
 must not therefore think, that he is
fond and *indulgent to our faults*; but on
 the contrary, because he is good, he
 cannot but *hate evil*. So the Scripture
 every where tells us, that *He is of*
purser eyes than to behold iniquity; that
the face of the Lord is against them that
do evil; *he is not a God that hath plea-*
sure in wickedness, *neither shall evil dwell*
with him; *the foolish shall not stand in*
his sight, *he hateth all the workers of in-*
iquity. He is ready to shew Mercy to
 those, who are qualified for it by Re-
 pentance, and resolution of a better
 Course; but as long as we continue
 impenitent, God is implacable, and
 will deal with us according to the
 tenor of his Laws, and the desert of
 our Doings. Despair is a great Sin,
 but Presumption is a greater; De-

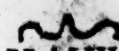
Vol. VII.  despair doubts of the goodness of God, but Presumption abuseth it ; Despair disbelieves, but Presumption perverts the best thing in the world to a quite contrary purpose from what it was intended.

III. The consideration of God's goodness is a mighty comfort and relief to our Minds, under all our Fears and Troubles. Great are the Fears and Jealousies of many devout Minds concerning God's Love to them, and their everlasting Condition ; which are commonly founded in one of these two causes, a melancholy Temper, or mistaken Notions and Apprehensions of God ; and very often these two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.


Melancholy as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a Disease not to be cured by Reason and Argument, but by Physick and Time ; but the mistakes which men have entertained concerning God, if they be not set on and heightned by Melancholy (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true representation of the *goodness* of God, confirmed by Reason and Scripture. Many good Men have

have had very hard and injurious Thoughts of God instill'd into them, Vol.VII.
from Doctrines too commonly taught and received ; as if he did not sincerely desire the happiness of his Creatures, but had from all Eternity decreed to make the greatest part of Mankind, with a secret purpose and design to make them miserable ; and consequently were not serious and in good earnest in his Invitations and Exhortations of Sinners to Repentance ; and it is no wonder if such Jealousies as these concerning God, make Men doubtful whether God love them, and very scrupulous and anxious about their everlasting condition.

I have already told you, that these harsh Doctrines have no manner of Foundation, either in Reason or Scripture ; that God earnestly desires our Happiness, and affords us sufficient Means to that End ; that he bears a more hearty good will to us, than any Man does to his Friend, or any Father upon Earth ever did to his dearest Child ; in comparison of which, the greatest Affection of Men to those whom they love best, is *but as the drop*

 drop of the Bucket, as the very small
 Vol. VII. dust upon the Balance. If we have
 right apprehensions of God's goodness,
 we can have no temptation to despair
 of his kind and merciful Intentions to
 us, provided we be but careful of our
 Duty to him, and do sincerely repent
 and forsake our Sins. Plainier Decla-
 rations no words can make, than those
 we meet with in the holy Scriptures,
 That God hath no pleasure in the death of
 the wicked, but rather that he should turn
 from his wickedness and live; that he
 would have all Men to be saved, and to
 come to the knowledge of the truth; that
 he is long suffering to us-ward, not wil-
 ling that any should perish, but that all
 should come to repentance; that he that
 confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall have
 mercy; that if the wicked forsake his ways,
 and the unrighteous man his thoughts,
 and return unto the Lord, he will have
 mercy, and will abundantly pardon.

As for outward Calamities and Af-
 flictions, the consideration of God's
 goodness is a firm ground of consolati-
 on to us, giving us assurance, that
 God will either prevent them by his
 Providence, or support us under them,
 or rescue us out of them, or turn them
 to

to our greater good and happiness in this World or the next. St. Paul  Vol. VII.
speaks of it as the firm belief and perswasion of all good Men, that in the issue all their Afflictions should prove to their advantage. *We know* (says he) *that all things shall work together for good to them that love God*; and one of the greatest Evidences of our love to God, is a firm belief and perswasion of his goodness; if we believe his goodness, we cannot but love him, and if we love him, *all things shall work together for our good.*

And this is a great Cordial to those who are under grievous Persecutions and Sufferings, which is the case of our Brethren in a neighbour Nation, and may come to be ours, God knows how soon. But tho' the malice of Men be great, and backt with a power not to be control'd by any visible means, and therefore likely to continue; yet the goodness of God is greater than the malice of Men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himself, when he was persecuted by Saul, Psal. 52. 1. *Why boasteth thou thy self in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness*
of

This Sermon was preach'd before the late happy Revolution.

of God endureth continually. The Persecution which *Saul* raised against him was very powerful, and lasted a long time; but he comforts himself with this, that *the goodness of God endures for ever.*

IV. The consideration of God's *goodness*, is a powerful motive and argument to several Duties.

I. To the love of God. And this is the most proper and natural effect and operation of the goodness of God upon our Minds. Several of the Divine Attributes are very awful, but *goodness* is amiable, and without this nothing else is so. Power and Wisdom may command Dread and Admiration; but nothing but Goodness can challenge our Love and Affection. Goodness is amiable for it self, tho' no benefit and advantage should from thence redound to us; but when we find the comfortable Effects of it, when *the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance*, are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodness, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for, this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was ami-

amiable for it self. We cannot but love him who *is good, and does us good*; whose goodness extends to all his Creatures, but is exercised in so peculiar a manner towards the Sons of Men, that it is called *Love*; and if God vouchsafe to love us, well may this be the *first and great Commandment*, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

2. The consideration of God's goodness is likewise an argument to us to fear him; not as a Slave does his Master, but as a Child does his Father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid is he to offend him. *There is forgiveness with thee* (saith the Psalmist) *that thou mayest be feared*; because God is ready to forgive, we should be afraid to offend. *Men shall fear the Lord, and his goodness*, (saith the Prophet) *Hosea 3. 5.* And indeed nothing is more to be dreaded, than despised Goodness and abused Patience, which turns into Fury and Vengeance; *despise thou the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance*, (says the Apostle) *and treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath,*

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wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?

3. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerful motive to obedience to his Laws, and as the Apostle expresseth it, *to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.* This Argument Samuel useth to the People of Israel, to perswade them to obedience, *1 Sam. 12. 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, with all your heart : for consider what great things he hath done for you.*

And indeed the Laws which God hath given us, are one of the chief Instances of his goodness to us, since they all tend to our good, and are proper Causes and Means of our Happiness; so that in challenging our obedience to his Laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his Benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his Laws require of us, is to do that which is best for our selves, and does most directly conduce to our own welfare and happiness. Considering our infinite obligations to God, he might have challenged our obedience to the severest and hardest Laws he could

could have imposed upon us ; so that as the Servants said to *Naaman*, *Had the Prophet bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it ? how much more when he hath only said, wash and be clean ?* If God had required of us things very grievous and burthensome, in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and chearful obedience to such Commands ; how much more, when he hath only said, *do this and be happy ?* In testimony of your love to me, do these things which are the greatest kindness and benefit to your selves.

4. *The goodness of God should lead Men to Repentance.* One of the greatest aggravations of our Sins is, that we offend against so much goodness, and make so bad a requital for it ; *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish People and unwise !* The proper tendency of God's goodness and patience to Sinners, is to bring them to a sense of their miscarriage, and to a resolution of a better course. When we reflect upon the blessings and favours of God, and his continual goodness to us, can we chuse but be ashamed of our terrible ingratitude and disobedience ?

ence? Nothing is more apt to make
 Vol. VII. an ingenuous Nature to relent, than
 the sense of undeserved kindness; that
 God should be so good to us, who are
evil and unthankful to him; that tho'
we be Enemies to him, yet when we
hunger, he feeds us; when we thirst, he
gives us to drink; heaping as it were coals
of fire on our heads, on purpose to melt
us into Repentance, and to overcome
our evil by his goodness.

5. The consideration of God's good-
 ness, is a firm ground of trust and con-
 fidence. What may we not hope and
 assuredly expect from immense and
 boundless goodness? If we have right
 apprehensions of the goodness of God,
 we cannot possibly distrust him, or
 doubt of the performance of those
 gracious promises which he hath made
 to us; the same goodness which incli-
 ned him to make such promises, will
 effectually engage him to make them
 good. If God be so good as he hath
 declared himself, why should we think
 that he will not help us in our need,
 and relieve us in our distress, and
 comfort us in our afflictions and sor-
 rows? If we may with confidence re-
 ly upon any thing to confer good upon
 ¶ us,

us, and to preserve and deliver us from Evil, we may trust infinite goodness.

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6. The goodness of God is likewise an argument to us to patience and contentedness with every condition. If the Hand of God be severe and heavy upon us in any Affliction, we may be assured that it is not without great cause, that so much goodness is so highly offended and displeased with us; that he designs our good in all the Evils he sends upon us, and does not *chasten us for his pleasure, but for our profit*; that we are the cause of our own Sufferings, and *our Sins separate between God and us, and withhold good things from us*; that in the final issue and result of things, *all things shall work together for good to us*; and therefore we ought not to be discontented at any thing which will certainly end in our Happiness.

7. Let us imitate the *goodness* of God. The highest Perfection of the best and most perfect Being is worthy to be our Pattern. This the Scripture frequently proposeth to us; *Math. 5.*

8. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

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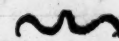
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How is that? in being good, and kind, and merciful, as God is. But I say unto you (says our Lord) Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despightfully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his Sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust. And then it follows, Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is heaven is perfect. The same Pattern St. Paul proposeth to us, Eph. 4. 32. and Ch. 5. 1. Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted; forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear Children, and walk in love. We cannot in any thing resemble God more, than in goodnesse, and kindness, and mercy, and in a readiness to forgive those who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this Perfection of God, and represent it to our Minds, that by the frequent contemplation of it, we may be transformed into the Image of the Divine Goodness.

Is

Is God so good to his Creatures ? 
with how much greater reason should Vol. VII.
we be so to our fellow Creatures. Is
God good to us ? let us imitate his
universal goodness, by endeavouring
the good of Mankind ; and, as much
as in us lies , of the whole Crea-
tion of God. What God is to
us, and what we would have him
still be to us, that let us be to others.
We are infinitely beholding to this
Perfection of God for all that we are,
and for all that we enjoy, and for
all that we expect ; and therefore we
have all the reason in the World to
admire and imitate it. Let this pat-
tern of the Divine Goodness be con-
tinually before us, that we may be
still fashioning our selves in the tem-
per of our Minds, and in the actions
of our Lives, to a likeness and con-
formity to it.


Lastly, The consideration of the
Divine *goodness*, should excite our
praise and thankfulness. This is a
great Duty, to the performance where-
of we should summon all the Powers
and Faculties of our Souls, as the holy
Psalmist does, *Psal. 103. Bless the
Lord, O my soul, and all that is within*

H 2

me,

me, bless his holy Name. Bless the
 Vol VII. Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his
 benefits. And we should invite all o-
 thers to the same Work, as the same
 devout Psalmist frequently does, *Psal.*
106. O give thanks unto the Lord ! for
he is good, for his mercy endureth for e-
ver. And Psal. 107. O that men would
therefore praise the Lord for his good-
ness, and for his wonderful works to the
children of Men !

And we had need to be often call'd
 upon to this Duty, to which we have
 a peculiar backwardness. Necessity
 drives us to Prayer, and sends us to
 God for the supply of our wants ; but
 Praise and Thanksgiving is a Duty
 which depends upon our gratitude
 and ingenuity ; and nothing sooner
 wears off, than the sense of Kindness
 and Benefits. We are very apt to for-
 get the blessings of God, not so much
 from a bad Memory, as from a bad
 Nature ; to forget the greatest bles-
 sings, the continuance whereof should
 continually put us in mind of them ;
 the blessings of our Beings ; So God
 complains of his People, *Deut. 32. Of*
the God that formed thee, thou hast been
unmindful ; the dignity and excel-
lency

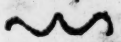
lency of our Beings above all the Creatures of this visible World ; *Job 35.*  Vol. VII.

10, 11. *None saith, Where is God my Maker ? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven ? the daily comforts and blessings of our Lives, which we can continually receive, without almost ever looking up to the Hand that gives them. So God complains by the Prophet, Hosea 2. 8,9. She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oyl, and multiplied her gold and silver. And is it not shameful to see how at the most plentiful Tables, the giving of God Thanks is almost grown out of fashion ; as if Men were ashamed to own from whence these Blessings came. When thanks is all God expects from us, can we not afford to give him that ? Do ye thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise ! It is just with God to take away his Blessings from us, if we deny him this easie tribute of Praise and Thanksgiving.*

It is a sign Men are unfit for Heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper Work and Employment of the blessed Spirits above.

H 3

There-

 Therefore as ever we hope to come
 Vol. VII. thither, let us begin this Work here,
 and inure our selves to that which will
 be the great business of all Eternity.
 Let us with *the four and twenty El-*
ders in the Revelation, fall down before
him that sits on the throne, and worship
him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast
our crowns before the throne (that is, cast
our selves) and ascribe all glory to
God; Saying, thou art worthy O Lord,
to receive glory, and honour, and power
for thou hast made all things, and for thy
pleasure they are, and were created.

To him therefore, the infinite and in-
exhaustible fountain of goodness, the fa-
ther of mercies, and the God of all conso-
lation, who gave us such excellent Beings,
having made us little lower than the
Angels, and crowned us with glory and ho-
nour; who hath been pleased to stamp up-
on us the image of his own goodness, and
thereby made us partakers of a divine na-
ture, communicating to us, not only of
the effects of his goodness, but in some
measure and degree of the perfection it self;
to him who gives us all things richly to en-
joy, which pertain to life and godliness,
and hath made such abundant provision,
not only for our comfort and convenience

in

a motive to praise him.

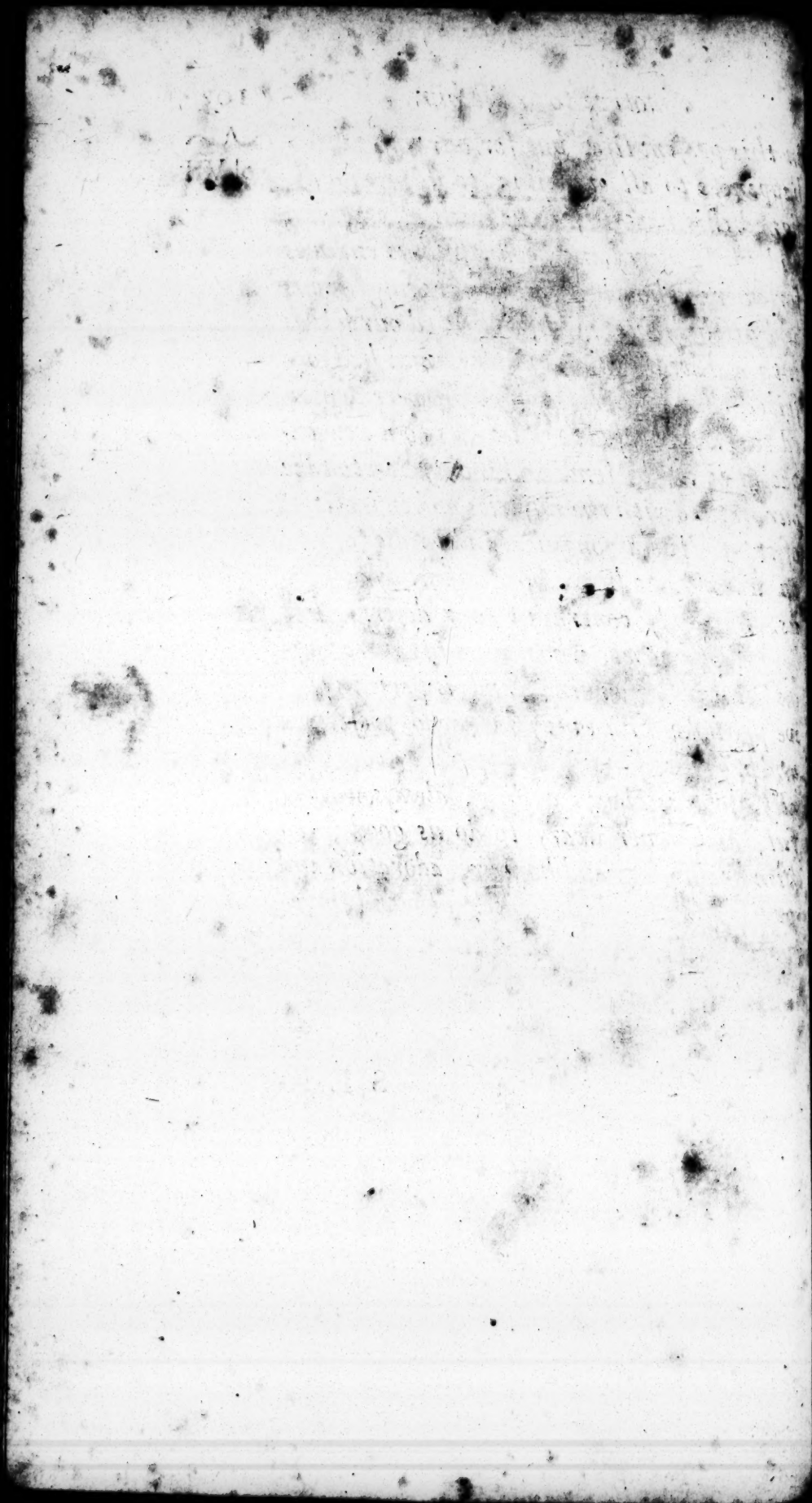
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in this present life, but for our unspeakable happiness to all eternity; to him who designed this happiness to us from all eternity, and whose mercy and goodness to us endures for ever; who when by willful transgressions and disobedience, we had plunged our selves into a state of sin and misery, and had forfeited that happiness which we were designed to, was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his only Son to take our nature with the miseries and infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for us; in a word, to him who is infinitely good to us, not only contrary to our deserts, but beyond our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every morning, and is patient tho' we provoke him every day, who preserves and provides for us, and spares us continually, who is always willing, always watchful, and never weary to do us good; to him be all glory and honour, adoration and praise, love and obedience, now and for ever.

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H 4

S E R.



SERMON V.

The Mercy of God.

NUMB. XIV. 18.

The Lord is long suffering, and of great Mercy.

I Have considered God's Goodness in general. There are two eminent Branches of it, his Patience and Mercy. The Patience of God is his goodness to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deserved punishment; the Mercy of God is his goodness to them that are or may be miserable. 'Tis the last of these two I design to discourse of at this time; in doing which, I shall inquire,

First, What we are to understand by the Mercy of God.

Se-

Secondly, Shew you, that this Per-
 Vol. VII. fection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the degree of it,
 that God is of *great Mercy*.

First, What we are to understand
 by the Mercy of God.

I told you it is his goodness to them
 that are in misery, or liable to it ;
 that is, that are in danger of it, or
 have deserved it. 'Tis mercy to pre-
 vent the misery that we are liable to,
 and which may befall us, tho' it be not
 actually upon us. 'Tis mercy to defer
 the misery that we deserve, or miti-
 gate it ; and this is properly patience
 and forbearance. 'Tis mercy to re-
 lieve those that are in misery, to sup-
 port or comfort them. 'Tis mercy to
 remit the misery we deserve, and by
 pardon and forgiveness to remove and
 take away the obligation to punish-
 ment.

Thus the mercy of God is usually
 in Scripture set forth to us by the af-
 fection of pity and compassion, which
 is an affection that causeth a sensible
 commotion and disturbance in us, up-
 on the apprehension of some great E-
 vil that lies upon another, or hangs
 over him. Hence it is that God is
 said

said in Scripture to be *grieved and afflicted* for the miseries of Men ; *his bowels are said to sound, and his heart to turn within him.* But tho' God is pleased in this manner to set forth his mercy and tenderness towards us, yet we must take heed how we cloath the Divine Nature with the Infirmities of human Passions. We must not measure the Perfection of God by the Expressions of his condescension ; and because he stoops to our weakness, level him to our Infirmities. When God is said to pity us, we must take away the imperfection of this Passion, the commotion and disturbance of it, and not imagine any such thing in God ; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compassion of God, without producing the disquiet, do produce the Effects of the most sensible pity.

Secondly, That this Perfection belongs to God.

All the Arguments that I used to prove the *goodness* of God, from the acknowledgment of natural Light, and from Scripture and Reason, serve to prove that he is *merciful* ; because the *mercy* of God is an eminent Branch of his

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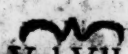
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his goodness. I will only produce some of those many Texts of Scripture which attribute this Perfection to God. *Exod. 34. 6. The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful. Deut. 4. 31. The Lord thy God is a merciful God. 2 Chron. 30. 9. The Lord your God is gracious and merciful. Neh. 9. 17. Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful. Psal. 25. 10. All the paths of the Lord are mercy. Psal. 62. 12. Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy. Psal. 103. 8. Merciful and gracious. Psal. 130. 7. With the Lord there is mercy. And so Jer. 3. 12. Joel 2. 13. Jonah 4. 2. Luke 6. 36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. The Scripture speaks of this as most natural to him, 2 Cor. 1. 3. he is called the Father of mercies. But when he punisheth, he doth as it were relinquish his Nature, and do a strange work. The Lord will wait that he may be gracious, Isa. 30. 18. God passeth by opportunities of punishing, but his mercy takes opportunity to display it self; he waits to be gracious. To afflict or punish is a Work that God is unwilling to, that he takes no pleasure in; Lam. 3. 33. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But mercy is a Work that he de-*

delights in, *Mic. 7. 18. He delighteth in mercy.* When God shews mercy, he does it with pleasure and delight; he is said to *rejoyce over his people to do them good.* Those Attributes that declare God's goodness, as when he is said to be gracious, or merciful, and long-suffering, they shew what God is in himself, and delights to be: those which declare his wrath and severity, shew what he is upon provocation, and the occasion of sin; not what he chuseth to be, but what we do as it were compel and necessitate him to be.

Thirdly, For the degree of it; that God is a God of *great mercy.*

The Scripture doth delight to advance the mercy of God, and does use great variety of Expression to magnifie it. It speaks of the greatness of his mercy, *Numb. 14. 19. According to the greatness of his mercy.* 2 Sam. 24. 14. *Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great.* 'Tis call'd an abundant mercy, 1 Pet. 1. 3. *According to his abundant mercy.* Psal. 103. 8. he is said to be *plenteous in mercy;* and *rich in mercy,* Eph. 2. 4. Psal. 5. 7. he speaks of the *multitude of God's*
mer-

 *mercies ; and of the variety of them,*
 Vol. VII. *Neh. 9. 18. In thy manifold mercies thou*
forsookest them not. So many are they,
that we are said to be surrounded and
campassed about on every side with
them ; Psal. 103. 4. Who crowneth us
with loving kindness and tender mer-
cies.

And yet further to set forth the greatness of them, the Scripture useth all dimensions. Heighth, *Psal. 57. 10. Thy mercy is great unto the Heavens.* Nay, higher yet ; *Psal. 108. 4. Thy mercy is great above the heavens.* For the latitude and extent of it, 'tis as large as the Earth, and extends to all the Creatures in it ; *Psal. 109. 64. The earth is full of thy mercy. Psal. 145. 8. His tender mercies are over all his works.* For the length, or duration and continuance of it ; *Exod. 34. 7. Laying up mercy in store for thousands of generations, one after another.* Nay, it is of a longer continuance ; *Psal. 118. 'tis several times repeated, That his mercy endureth for ever.*


And to shew the intense degree of this affection of mercy or pity, the Scripture useth several emphatical Expressions to set it forth to us. The

¶

Scrip-

Scripture speaks of the tender mercies of God, *Psal. 25. 6. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies.* Yea, of the multitude of these, *Psal. 51. 1. According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Jam. 5. 11. The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.* They are called God's Bowels, which are the tenderest parts, and apt to yern and stir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited, *Is. 63. 15. Where is the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies, are they restrained? Luke 1. 78. Through the tender mercy of our God.* So it is in our Translation; but if we render it from the Original, 'tis *through the bowels of the mercies of our God.* How doth God condescend in those pathetical Expressions, which he useth concerning his People? *Hos. 11. 8. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* Nay, to express his tender sense of our miseries and sufferings, he is represented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our sufferings; *Isa. 63. 9. In all their afflictions he was afflicted.*

The

 Vol VII. The compassions of God are compared to the tenderest affections among Men; to that of a Father towards his Children; *Psal. 103. 13. As a father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* Nay, to the compassions of a Mother towards her Infant; *Isa. 49. 15. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?* Yea she may, 'tis possible, tho' most unlikely: but tho' a Mother may turn unnatural; yet God cannot be unmerciful.

In short, the Scripture doth every where magnifie the mercy of God, and speak of it with all possible advantage; as if the Divine Nature, which doth in all Perfections excel all others, did in this excel it self. The Scripture speaks of it as if God was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his constant Exercise and Employment, so that in comparison of it, he doth hardly display any other excellency; *Psal. 25. 10. All the paths of the Lord are mercy;* as if in this World God had a design to advance his mercy above his other Attributes. The mercy of God is now in the Throne, this is the day
of

of mercy, and God doth display it many times with a seeming dishonour to his other Attributes, his Justice, and Holiness, and Truth. *His Justice*; This makes *Job* complain of the long life and prosperity of the wicked; *Job* 41. 7. *Wherefore do the wicked live, yea become old? &c.* *His Holiness*; This makes the Prophet expostulate with God, *Hab.* 1. 13. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue? &c.* And the Truth of God; This makes *Jonah* complain, as if God's mercies were such, as did make some reflection upon his truth, *Jon.* 4. 2.

But that we may have more distinct apprehensions of the greatness and number of God's mercies, I will distribute them into kinds, and rank them under several Heads. 'Tis mercy to prevent those evils and miseries that we are liable to. 'Tis mercy to defer those evils that we have deserved, or to mitigate them. 'Tis mercy to support and comfort us when misery is upon us. 'Tis mercy to deliver us from them. But the greatest mercy

I of

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of all is, to remit the evil and misery we have deserved, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation to punishment ; so that the mercy of God may be reduced to these five Heads.

I. Preventing Mercy. Many evils and miseries which we are liable to God prevents them at a great distance and when they are coming towards us, he stops them or turns them another way. The merciful Providence of God, and those invisible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We seldom take notice of God's preventing mercy ; we are not apt to be sensible how great a mercy it is to be freed from those straits and necessities, those pains and diseases of Body, those inward racks and horrors, which others are pressed withal and labour under. When any evil or misery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be rescued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that Man owe more to his Physician who prevents his sickness and distemper, than he who after the weakness and languishing, the pains

pains and tortures of several Months, Vol. VII.
is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the *patience* of God, which consists in the deferring or moderating of our deserved punishment. Hence it is that *slow to anger, and of great mercy*, do so often go together. But this I shall speak to hereafter in some particular Discourses.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 Cor. 1.
3. *The father of mercies, and the God of all Comfort.* The Scripture represents God as very merciful, in comforting and supporting those that are afflicted and cast down; hence are those expressions of *putting his arms under us, bearing us up, speaking comfortably, visiting us with his loving kindness*, which signify God's merciful regard to those who are in misery and distress.

IV. His relieving mercy, in supplying those that are in want, and delivering those that are in trouble. God doth many times exercise Men with troubles and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful design, to prevent greater Evils, which Men would otherwise bring upon themselves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of

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Heaven to do us that good, which nothing else can; they awaken us to a sense of God, and of our selves, to a consideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of God, to seek him, and enquire after him. God doth as it were by Afflictions throw Men upon their backs to make them look up to Heaven; *Hos. 5. 15. In their affliction they will seek me early. Psal. 78. 34. When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned, and enquired early after God.* But God does not delight in this, *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* When afflictions have accomplished their work, and obtained their end upon us, God is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; *Isa. 54. 7, 8. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.*

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatness and fullness of God's mercy appears, because our sins are great; *Psal. 78. 38. Being full of compassion,*

passion, he forgave their iniquity. And the multitude of God's mercies, be- Vol.VII.
cause our sins are many, Psal. 51. 1. Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Exod. 34. 7. He is said to pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin. How manyfold are his mercies, to forgive all our sins, of what kind so ever ! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our sins, is matter of astonishment and admiration ; Mic. 7. 18. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity ! But especially if we consider by what means our pardon is procured ; by transferring our guilt upon the most innocent person, the Son of God, and making him to bear our iniquities, and to suffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God's mercy appears in this dispensation ; this shews the riches of his grace, that he should be at so much cost to purchase our pardon, Not with corruptible things, as silver and gold ; but with the precious blood of his own Son ; Eph. 1. 6, 7. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved ; in whom we have redemption through his
I 3 *blood,*

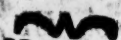
*blood, the forgiveness of sins, according
Vol. VII. to the riches of his grace.*

Having dispatch'd the *three* particulars I propos'd to be spoken to, I shall shew what Use we ought to make of this Divine Attribute.

Use 1. We ought with thankfulness to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all its dimensions ; the heighth, and length, and breadth of it : in all the variety and kinds of it ; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Those miseries that lye upon others, 'tis mercy to us that we escaped them. 'Tis mercy that spares us. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* 'Tis mercy that mitigates our punishment, and makes it fall below the desert of our sins. 'Tis mercy that comforts and supports us under any of those Evils that lye upon us, and that rescues and delivers us from them. Which way so ever we look, we are encompassed with the mercies of God ; *they compass us about on every side, we are crowned with loving kindness and tender mercies.* 'Tis mercy that feeds us, and cloaths us, and that pre-

acknowledg'd and admir'd by us.

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preserves us. But above all we should
thankfully acknowledge and admire 
the pardoning mercy of God ; *Psf. 103.* Vol.VII.

1, 2, 3. where *David* does as it were
muster up the mercies of God, and
make a Catalogue of them, he sets
the pardoning mercy in the front ;
*Bless ye the Lord, O my soul, and all
that is within me praise his holy Name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not
all his benefits ; who forgiveth all thy
iniquities.*

If we look into our selves, and con-
sider our own temper and disposition,
how void of pity and bowels we are,
how cruel, and hard hearted, and in-
solent, and revengeful ; if we look a-
broad into the World, and see how
*full the earth is of the habitations of
cruelty* ; we shall admire the mercy of
God more, and think our selves more
beholden to it. How many things
must concur to make our hearts ten-
der, and melt our spirits, and stir our
bowels, to make us pitiful and com-
passionate ? We seldom pity any un-
less they be actually in misery ; nor
all such neither, unless the misery
they lye under be very great ; nor
then neither, unless the person that

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suf-


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suffers be nearly related, and we be someways concerned in his sufferings; yea, many times not then neither, upon a generous account, but as we are someways obliged by interest and self-love, and a dear regard to our selves, when we have suffered the like our selves, and have learnt to pity others by our own Sufferings, or when in danger and probability to be in the like condition our selves; so many motives and obligations are necessary to awaken and stir up this affection in us. But God is merciful and pitiful to us, out of the mere goodness of his Nature; for few of these motives and considerations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderness is stirred up in God by the mere presence of the Object, without any other inducement. The mercy of God many times doth not stay till we be actually miserable; but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great distance, and prevents our misery. God doth not only pity us in great Calamities; but considers those lesser Evils that are upon us. God is merciful to us, when we have deserved all the Evils that
are

acknowledg'd and admir'd by us.

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are upon us, and far greater, when we are *less than the least of all his mercies*, when we deserved all the misery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to our selves. Tho' God, in respect of his Nature, be at an infinite distance from us, yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot possibly have any self-interest in it. The Divine Nature is not liable to want, or injury, or suffering; he is secure of his own happiness and fullness, and can neither wish the enlargement nor fear the impairment of his Estate; he can never stand in need of pity or relief from us or any other; and yet he pities us.

Now if we consider the vast difference of this affection in God and us, how tender his mercies are, and how sensible his bowels; and yet we who have so many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as if we were *born of the rock*, and were *the off-spring of the nether milstone*; sure when we duly consider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of God.

How

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How cruel are we to Creatures below us! with how little remorse can we kill a Flea, or tread upon a Worm? partly because we are secure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themselves upon us; and partly because they are so despicable in our Eyes, and so far below us, that they do not fall under the consideration of our Pity. Look upward, proud Man! and take notice of him who is above thee, thou didst not make the Creatures below thee as God did, there's but a finite distance between thee and the meanest Creatures; but there's an infinite distance between thee and God. Man is a Name of Dignity, when we compare our selves with other Creatures; but compared to God, we are *Worms, and not Men*; yea, we are *nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity*. How great then is the Mercy of God, which regards us, who are so far below him, which takes into Consideration such inconsiderable nothings as we are! we may say with *David, Ps. 8. 4. Lord! What is man, that thou art so mindful of him, or the Son of Man that thou visitest him!* And with *Job 7. 17. What*
is


acknowledg'd and admir'd by us.

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*is Man that thou shouldest magnifie him, and that thou shouldest set thine Heart up-
on him!*

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And then how hard do we find it to forgive those who have injured us? if any one have offended, or provoked us; how hard are we to be reconciled? How mindful of an Injury? How do anger and revenge boyl within us? How do we upbraid Men with their faults? What vile and low Submission do we require of them, before we will receive them into Favour, and grant them Peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offence and provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the Disciples of our Saviour, after he had so emphatically taught them Forgiveness, in the Petition in the Lord's Prayer, yet they had very narrow Spirits as to this; *Matth. 18. 21. Peter comes to him, and asks him, How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?* He thought that was much: And yet we have great obligations to Pardoning and Forgiving others, because we are obnoxious to God
and

 and one another, we shall many
 Vol. VII. times stand in need of Pardon from
 God and Men ; and it may be our
 own case, and when it is, we are
 too apt to be very indulgent to
 our selves, and conceive good hopes
 of the Mercy of others ; we would
 have our ignorance, and inadverten-
 cies, and mistakes, and all occasions
 and temptations and provocations
 considered ; and when we have done
 amiss, upon Submission and Acknow-
 ledgment of our Fault, we would be
 received into Favour : but God who
 is not at all liable to us, how rea-
 dy is he to Forgive ! If we confess
 our Sins to him, he is merciful to
 Forgive ; he Pardons freely ; and such
 are the condescensions of his Mercy,
 tho' he be the party offended, yet
 he offers Pardon to us, and beseeches
 us to be reconcil'd ; if we do but
 come towards him, he runs to meet
 us, as in the Parable of the Prodi-
 gal, *Luke* 15. 20. What reason have
 we then thankfully to acknowledge
 and admire the Mercy of God to
 us ?

Use 2. The great mercy of God
 to us, should stir up in us shame and
 sorrow

sorrow for Sin. The Judgments of God may break us; but the consideration of God's Mercy should rather melt and dissolve us into Tears, *Luke 7. 47.* The Woman that washed Christ's Feet with her Tears, and wiped them with her Hair, the account that our Saviour gives of the great Affection that she expressed to him, was, *she Loved much, because much was forgiven her*; and she grieved much, because much was forgiven her.

Especially we should sorrow for those Sins, which have been committed by us after God's Mercies received. Mercies after Sins should touch our Hearts, and make us relent. It should grieve us that we should offend and provoke a God so Gracious and Merciful, so slow to anger, and so ready to forgive: But Sin against Mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greatest Aggravations of Sin. And as Mercy raises the guilt of our Sins, so it should raise our sorrow for them. No Consideration is more apt to work upon human Nature, than that of kindness,

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kindness, and the greater Mercy has been shewed to us, the greater our sins, and the greater cause of sorrow for them; contraries do illustrate, and set off one another; in the great Goodness and Mercy of God to us, we see the great Evil of our Sins against him.

Every Sin has the Nature of Rebellion and Disobedience; but sins against Mercy have Ingratitude in them. When ever we break the Laws of God, we rebel against our Sovereign; but as we sin against the Mercies of God, we injure our Benefactor. This makes our sin to be horrid, and astonishing, *Isa. 1. 2. Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. All the Mercies of God are aggravations of our sins, 2 Sam. 12. 7, 8, 9. And Nathan said to David, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hands of Saul, and I gave thee thy masters house, and thy masters wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel, and of Judah, and if that had been too little,*

little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? God reckons up all his Mercies, and from them aggravates David's sin; 1 Kings 11. 9. He takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his Mercy; and 'tis the worst temper in the World not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by Mercy; no greater evidence of a wicked Heart, than that the Mercies of God have no effect upon it; Esay 26. 10. *Let favour be shewn to the wicked; yet will he not learn righteousness.*

Use 3. Let us imitate the merciful Nature of God. This branch of God's goodness is very proper for our imitation. The general Exhortation of our Saviour, Matt. 5. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*, is more particularly expressed by St. Luke, Luke 6. 30. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful.* Men affect to make Images, and impossible Representations of God; but as Seneca saith, *Crede Deos,*

Deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.
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We may draw this Image and likeness of God ; we may be gracious and merciful as he is. Christ, who was *the express image of his Father*, his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy ; *he went about doing good* to the Souls of Men, by Preaching the Gospel to them ; and to the Bodies of Men, in healing all manner of Diseases. There is nothing that he recommends more to us in his Gospel than this Spirit and Temper ; *Mat. 5. 7. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.* How many Parables doth he use to set forth the mercy of God to us, with a design to draw us to the imitation of it ? The Parable of the Prodigal ; of the good Samaritan ; of the Servant to whom he forgave 10000 Talents. We should imitate God in this ; in being tender and compassionate to those that are in misery.

This is a piece of natural, indispensable Religion, to which positive and instituted Religion must give way ; *Amos 6. 6. I desired mercy, and not sacrifice ;* which is twice cited and used by our Saviour. *Micah. 6. 8. He hath shewed*

shewed thee, O Man, what it is that the Lord thy God requires of thee, to do justice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

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This is always one part of the description of a good Man, that he is apt to pity the miseries and necessities of others. *Psal. 37. 26. He is ever merciful and lendeth.* He is far from cruelty, not only to Men, but even to the brute Creatures; *Prov. 12. 10. A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.* There is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, than a cruel and savage disposition, not to be affected with the miseries and sufferings of others; how unlike is this to *the father of mercies, and the God of consolation!* When we can see Cruelty exercised, and our Bowels not be stirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to God, who is *very pitiful, and of tender mercies!* But to rejoyce at the miseries of others, this is inhumane and barbarous. Hear how God threatens *Edom* for rejoycing at the miseries of his Brother *Jacob*; *Obadiah 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.* But to delight to make others miserable, and to aggravate their sufferings, this is

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Vol VII. devilish; this is the temper of Hell, and the very spirit of the Destroyer.

It becomes Man above all other Creatures to be merciful, who hath had such ample and happy experience of God's mercy to him, and doth still continually stand in need of mercy from God. God hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender Mercies of God to us, we had all of us long since been miserable. Now as we have receiv'd mercy from God, we should shew it to others. The Apostle useth this as an Argument why we should relieve those that are in misery and want, because we have had such experience of the mercy and love of God to us; 1 John 3. 16, 17. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. But whoso hath this worlds goods, and seeth his brother have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of God in him?* That Man hath no sense of the mercy of God abiding upon his Heart, that is not merciful to his Brother. And 'tis an Argument why we should forgive one another; Eph. 4. 32. *Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for*

for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Chap. Vol. VII.

5. 1. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear Children. Col. 3. 12, 13. Put on therefore (as the elect of God holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

And we continually stand in need of mercy both from God and Man. We are lyable one to another, and in the change of human Affairs, we may be all subject to one another by turns, and stand in need of one anothers pity and compassion; and we must expect, that *with what measure we mete to others, with the same it shall be measured to us again.* To restrain the Cruelties, and check the Insolencies of Men, God has so order'd in his Providence, that very often in this World Mens Cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane.

But if Men were not thus liable to one another, we all stand in need of mercy from God. If we be merciful

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to others in suffering, and forgiving them that have injured us, God will be so to us, he will pardon our sins to us. Prov. 16. 5. *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.* 2. Sam. 22. 26. *With the merciful thou wilt shew thy self merciful.* Prov. 14. 21. *He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.* Prov. 21. 21. *He that followeth after mercy findeth life.* Matth. 6. 14. *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you.* But on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to those that have offended us, and inexorable to those who desire to be received to favour, and cruel to those who lye at our mercy, hard hearted to them that are in necessity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of God will leave us, that he will *forget to be gracious, and shut up in anger his tender mercy.* Mat. 6. 15. *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.* That is a dreadful passage, S. James 2. 13. *He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.* How angry is the Lord with the Servant who was so inexorable to his fellow Ser-

Servant, after he had forgiven him so great a debt, as you find in the Parable, *Mat. 18. 24.* He owed him ten thousand Talents, and upon his submission and intreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion and loosed him, and forgave him all: but no sooner had this favour been done to him by his Lord, but going forth he meets his fellow Servant, who owed him a small inconsiderable debt, an hundred Pence, he lays Hands on him, and takes him by the Throat, and roundly demands payment of him; he falls down at his Feet, and useth the same form of supplication that he had used to his Lord, but he rejects his request, and puts him in Prison. Now what saith the Lord to him? *v. 32, 33, 34.* *O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And the Lord was wroth, and deliver'd him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.* Now what application doth our Saviour make of this? *v. 35.* *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your*

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hearts

 hearts forgive not every one his brother
Vol. VII. their trespasses.

God's readiness to forgive us should be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greatest Injuries that we can suffer from Men, if we compare them to the sins that we commit against God, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as *an hundred pence to ten thousand talents*. If we would be like God, we should forgive the greatest Injuries; he pardoneth our sins tho' they be exceeding great: many Injuries, tho' offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied; for so God doth to us, *He pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin, Ex. 34. 7. If. 55. 7. He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon*. We would not have God only to forgive us *seven times*, but *seventy seven times*, as often as we offend him: so should we forgive our Brother.

And we should not be backward to this Work; God is *ready to forgive* us; *Neb. 9. 17*. And we should do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we say we forgive, carry on a secret

cret design in our hearts of revenging our selves when we have opportunity ; but we should *from our hearts forgive every one* ; for so God doth to us, who when he forgives us, *casts our iniquities behind his back, and throws them into the bottom of the sea, and blots out our transgression, so as to remember our iniquity no more.* Vol. VII.

If we do not do thus, every time we put up the Petition to God, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*, we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment ; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a Prayer, but a dreadful Imprecation against our selves ; we pronounce the Sentence of our own Condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Use 4. If the mercy of God be so great, this may comfort us against Despair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they consider their unworthiness, the nature and number of their Sins, and the many heavy aggravations of them ; they are apt to say with Cain, *That their sin is greater than can be forgiven.* But do not look only upon thy sins ; but upon the mercies of

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God.

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God. Thou canst not be too sensible of the evil of sin, and of the desert of it; but whilst we aggravate our sins, we must not lessen the mercies of God. When we consider the multitude of our sins, we must consider also the multitude of God's tender mercies; we have been great sinners, and God is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thy self in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy sins, and forsaking of them, and thou hast no reason to doubt but the mercy of God will receive thee; *If we confess our sins, he is merciful and faithful to forgive them.* If we had offended Man as we have done God, we might despair of pardon; but it is God and not Man that we have to deal with; and *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.*

We cannot be more injurious to God, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and when we have provoked him, he were not to be

be appeased and reconciled to us. We disparage the Goodness and Truth of God, when we distrust those gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodness, if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compassionate sinners, and really desire their happiness. Doth not he condescend so low as to represent himself afflicted for the miseries of Men, and to rejoyce in the conversion of a Sinner? and shall not we believe that he is in good earnest? Doth Christ *weep over* impenitent Sinners, because *they will not know the things of their peace?* and canst thou think he will not pardon thee upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that Men will undo themselves, and will not be saved? and canst thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot honour and glorifie God more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his Mercy. As we are said to glorifie God by our repentance, because thereby we acknowledge God's holiness and justice; so we glorifie him by believing his mercy, because we conceive a right opinion of his goodness and truth; we set to our Seal that God is merciful
and

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and true; *Psal. 147. 11. 'tis said, That God taketh pleasure in them that hope in his mercy.* As he delights in mercy, so in our acknowledgments of it; that Sinners should conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou dost submit to the terms of God's mercy, thou hast no reason to despair of it; and he that thinks that his sins are more or greater than the mercy of God can pardon, must think that there may be more evil in the Creature than there is goodness in God.

Use 5. By way of Caution against the presumptuous Sinner. If there be any that trespass upon the goodness of God, and presume to encourage themselves in sin upon the hopes of his mercy, let such know, that God is just as well as merciful. A God all of mercy is an Idol, such a God as Men set up in their own imaginations; but not the true God, whom the Scriptures describe. To such persons the Scripture describes him after another manner; *Nah. 1. 2. God is jealous, the Lord revengeth and is furious, the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies.* If any Man abuse

buse the mercy of God to the strength-
 ning of himself in his own wickedness, Vol. VII.
 and bleſs himself in his heart, ſaying, I
 ſhall have peace, tho' I walk in the imagi-
 nation of my own heart, and add drunkenneſs
 to thirſt: The Lord will not ſpare him,
 but the anger of the Lord and his jealou-
 ſie ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and all
 the curſes that are written in this book
 ſhall lye upon him, and he will blot out his
 name from under heaven, Deut. 29. 19,
 20.

Though it be the nature of God to
 be merciful, yet the exerciſe of his
 mercy is regulated by his Wiſdom; he
 will not be merciful to thoſe that de-
 ſpiſe his mercy, to thoſe that abuſe it,
 to thoſe that are reſolved to go on in
 their ſins to tempt his mercy, and
 make bold to ſay, *Let us ſin that grace
 may abound.* God deſigns his mercy
 for thoſe that are prepared to receive
 it; *Iſ. 55. 7. Let the wicked forſake his
 ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,
 and turn unto the Lord, and he will have
 mercy, and to our God, for he will abun-
 dantly pardon.* The mercy of God is
 an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice;
 and 'tis no where offer'd to counte-
 nance ſin, but to convert the ſinner;
 and

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and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. God hath now where said that he will be merciful to those, who upon the score of his mercy are bold with him, and presume to offend him; but *the mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him, and keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.* There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared; but not that he may be despised and affronted. This is to contradict the very end of God's mercy, which is to lead us to repentance, to engage us to leave our sins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abusing the mercy of God; we cannot provoke the justice of God more than by presuming upon his mercy. This is the time of God's mercy, use this opportunity; if thou neglectest it, a day of justice and vengeance is coming; *Rom. 2. 4, 5. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance? And treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?* Now is the manifestation of God's mercy; but there is a time a
com-

coming, when the righteous Judgment of God will be revealed against those who abuse his mercy, *not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance.* To think that the goodness of God was intended for any other end than to take us off from sin, is a gross and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any conclusion from the mercy of God, which may harden them in their sins, they are such as the Prophet speaks of, *Is. 27. 11. A people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not save them, and he that formed them will have no mercy on them.* Mercy it self will rejoyce in the ruin of those that abuse it, and it will aggravate their Condemnation. There is no person towards whom God will be more severely just, than toward such. The justice of God exasperated, and set on by his injured and abused mercy, like a Razor set in Oyl, will have the keener edge, and be the sharper for its smoothness. Those that have made the mercy of God their Enemy, must expect the worst his justice can do unto them.

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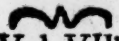
SERMON VI.

The Patience of God.

2 PET. III. 9.

The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, as some Men count slackness ; but is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.

IN the beginning of this Chapter, the Apostle puts the Christians, to whom he writes, in mind of the Predictions of the ancient Prophets, and of the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, concerning the general Judgment of the World, which by many (and perhaps by the Apostles themselves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would presently follow the destruction of *Jerusalem* ; but he

 he tells them, that before *that*, there
 Vol. VII would arise a certain Sect, or sort of
 Men, that would deride the expectation
 of a future Judgment, designing
 probably the *Carpocratians* (a branch
 of that large Sect of the *Gnosticks*) of
 whom St. *Austin* expressly says,
 'That they denied the Resurrection,
 'and consequently a future Judgment.
 These St. *Peter* calls *Scoffers*, v. 3, 4.
Knowing this first, that there shall come
in the last days scoffers, walking after
their own lusts; and saying, Where is the
promise of his coming? The word is
ἐπαγγελία, which signifies a *Declara-*
tion in general, whether it be by way
 of *Promise* or *Threatning*. What is be-
 come of that *Declaration* of Christ so
 frequently repeated in the Gospel, con-
 cerning his *coming* to Judgment? For
since the Fathers fell asleep, or, saying that
the Fathers are fallen asleep, except on-
 ly that Men die; and one Generation
 succeeds another, *all things continue as*
they were from the creation of the world;
 that is, the World continues still as it
 was from the beginning, and there is
 no sign of any such change and alte-
 ration as is foretold. To this he an-
 swers *two* things.


¶

1. That

1. That these Scoffers, tho' they took themselves to be Wits, did betray great Ignorance, both of the condition of the World, and of the nature of God. They talk'd very ignorantly concerning the World, when they said, *All things continued as they were from the Creation of it*, when so remarkable a change had already hapned, as the destruction of it by Water ; and therefore the Prediction concerning the destruction of it by Fire, before the great and terrible day of Judgment, was no ways incredible. And they shewed themselves likewise very ignorant of the Perfection of the Divine Nature, to which, being eternally the same, *a thousand years and one day are all one* ; and if God make good his word some thousand of Years hence, it will make no sensible difference, considering his eternal duration, it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end ; v. 8. *Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* This, it seems, was a common saying among the Jews, to signify, that to the Eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion ;


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and

 and therefore with regard to Eternity,
 Vol. VII. it is all one whether it be a thousand
 Years or one Day. The Psalmist hath
 an Expression much to the same pur-
 pose, *Psal. 90. 4. For a thousand years*
in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is
past ; and as a watch in the night. And
 the Son of Sirach likewise, *Ecclus. 18.*
10. As a drop of water to the sea, and as
a grain of sand to the sea shore, so are a
thousand years to the days of eternity.
 The like Expression we meet with in
 Heathen Writers ; *To the Gods no time*
is long, saith *Pythagoras* : And *Plutarch,*
The whole space of a Man's life to the Gods
is as nothing. And in his excellent
 Discourse of the slowness of the Divine
 Vengeance, (the very Argument *St.*
Peter is here upon) he hath this Pas-
 sage, *That a thousand, or ten thousand*
years, are but as an indivisible point to
an infinite duration. And therefore
 when the Judgment is to be eternal,
 the delay of it, though it were for a
 thousand Years, is an Objection of no
 force, against either the certainty, or
 the terror of it ; for to Eternity, all time
 is equally short ; and it matters not
 when the punishment of Sinners be-
 gins, if it shall never have an end.

2. But

2. But because the distance between the Declaration of a future Judgment, and the coming of it, tho' it be nothing to God, yet it seemed long to them; therefore he gives such an account of it, as doth not in the least impeach the truth and faithfulness of God, but is a clear argument and demonstration of his goodness. Admitting what they said to be true, that God delays Judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that Judgment will never be; but it shews the great goodness of God to sinners, that he gives them so long a space of repentance, that so they may prevent the terror of that day whenever it comes, and escape that dreadful ruin which will certainly overtake, sooner or later, all impenitent sinners; *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise*; that is, as to the Declaration which he hath made of a future Judgment, *as some Men account slackness*; That is, as if the delay of Judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a false inference from the delay of punishment, and an ill interpretation of the goodness of God to sinners, who bears long with them, and delays Judgment, on purpose

 pose to give men time to repent, and
 Vol. VII. by repentance to prevent their own
 eternal ruin ; God is not slack con-
 cerning his promise, as some men count
 slackness ; but is long suffering to us-ward,
 not willing that any should perish, but
 that all should come to repentance. In
 the handling of these words, I shall
 do these three things.

First, I shall consider the patience
 and long-suffering of God, as it is an
 Attribute and Perfection of the Di-
 vine Nature ; God is long-suffering to
 us-ward.

Secondly, I shall shew, that the Pa-
 tience of God, and the delay of
 Judgment, is no just ground why sin-
 ners should hope for Impunity, as the
Scoffers, here foretold by the Apostle,
 argued, That because our Lord delay-
 eth his coming to Judgment so long,
 therefore he would never come ; God
 is not slack concerning his promise, as some
 men count slackness.

Thirdly, I will consider the true Rea-
 son of God's Patience and long-suffer-
 ing towards Mankind, which the A-
 postle here gives ; He is long-suffering
 to us-ward, not willing that any should
 perish, but that all should come to repen-
 tance.

First,

First, I will consider the Patience and long-suffering of God towards Mankind, as it is an Attribute and Perfection of the Divine Nature; God is long-suffering to us-ward. In the handling of this, I shall do these three things.

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I. I shall shew what is meant by the Patience and long-suffering of God.

II. That this is a Perfection of the Divine Nature.

III. I shall give some proof and demonstration of the great Patience and long-suffering of God to Mankind.

I. What is meant by the Patience and long-suffering of God.

The Hebrew word signifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the New Testament it is sometimes exprest by the word *ὑπομνή*, which signifies God's forbearance and patient waiting for our repentance; sometimes by the word *ἀνοχή*, which signifies God's holding in his wrath, and restraining himself from punishing; and sometimes by *μακροθυμία*, which signifies the extent of his patience, his long-suffering and for-

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bearing

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 Vol. VII. bearing for a long time the punishment due to sinners.

So that the patience of God is his goodness to sinners, in deferring or moderating the punishment due to them for their sins; the deferring of deserved punishment in whole or in part, which if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his long-suffering; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the punishment due to sin, is an instance likewise of God's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal punishment, but the adjourning of the eternal misery of sinners, is a principal instance of God's patience; so that the patience of God takes in all that space of repentance which God affords to sinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befall sinners in this life, and are short of cutting them off and turning them into Hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whenever God punisheth, *it is of his great mercy and patience that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* I proceed to the

II. Thing

II. Thing I proposed, which was to shew, that Patience is a Perfection of the Divine Nature. Vol. VII.

It is not necessarily due to us, but it is due to the Perfection of the Divine Nature, and essentially belongs to it; it is a principal branch of God's goodness, which is the highest and most glorious Perfection of all other, and therefore we always find it in Scripture, in the company of God's milder and sweeter Attributes. When God would give the most perfect description of himself, and as he says to *Moses*, *make all his glory to pass before us*, he usually does it by those Attributes which declare his Goodness; and Patience is always one of them, *Exod. 34. 6. The Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Psal. 86. 15. But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Psal. 103. 8. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. And the same you find, Psal. 145. 8. Jonah 4. 2. Joel 2. 13.*



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Sometimes indeed you find a seventh Attribute added to these, as that *he will by no means clear the guilty*, Exod. 34. 7. But 'tis always put in the last place, to declare to us, that God's goodness, and mercy, and patience, are his first and primary Perfections; and it is only when these fail, and have no effect upon us, but are abused by us to the encouragement of our selves in an impenitent course, that his Justice takes place.

Nay, even among Men it is esteemed a Perfection to be able to forbear and to restrain our anger; Passion is impotency and folly, but Patience is power and wisdom; *Prov. 14. 29. He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly; but he that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding. Prov. 16. 32. He that is slow to wrath, is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that conquereth a city. Rom. 12. 21. Be not overcome of Evil: but overcome Evil with good.* To be impatient is to be overcome, but to forbear anger and revenge is a victory. Patience is an argument of great power and command of our selves, and therefore God himself, who is the most powerful Being, is slow

to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the Power of God, than his Patience, that when he is provoked by such vile and despicable Creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from destroying us. This is the argument which *Moses* useth *Numb. 14. 17, 18.* that the Power of God, doth so eminently appear in his patience; *And now, I pray thee, let the power of my Lord be great, as he hath spoken, saying, the Lord is gracious and long-suffering.* And yet Power, where it is not restrained by wisdom and goodness, is a great temptation to anger; because where there is Power, there is something to back it and make it good. And therefore the Psalmist doth recommend and set off the Patience of God, from the consideration of his Power; *Psal. 7. 11. God is strong and patient, God is provoked every day; God is strong, and therefore patient;* or he is infinitely patient, notwithstanding his Almighty Power to revenge the daily provocations of his Creatures.

Among Men, anger and weakness commonly go together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the Son of *Sirach, Eccclus. 10. 18.*

*Pride*

 **Vol. VII.** *Pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman.* So that anger and impatience is every where unreasonable. Where there is Power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for Omnipotency; and where there wants Power, anger is above it; it is too much for a weak and impotent Creature to be angry. Where there is Power, anger is needless and of no use; and where there is no Power, it is vain and to no purpose. So that Patience is every where a Perfection, both in God and Man. I proceed to the

III. Thing I propos'd, which was to give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to Mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we consider these *two* things.

1. How Men deal with God.

2. How, notwithstanding this, God deals with them.


1. How Men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our Iniquities, as the Expression is in the Prophet, *Isa. 43. 24. Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast*


*hast wearied me with thine iniquities.* Every sin that we commit, is an affront to the Divine Majesty, and a contempt of his Authority. By denying submission to his Laws, we question his Omnipresence, and say, *Doth God see? and is there knowledge in the most high?* Or if we acknowledge his Omnipresence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is still the greater, because then we affront him to his face; we dare his Justice, and challenge his Omnipotency, and *provoke the Lord to jealousy*, as if we were stronger than he.

Is not God patient, when *the whole world lies in wickedness*, and *the earth is overspread with violence*, and is full of the *habitations of cruelty*? when he who is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and is so highly offended at the sins of Men, hath yet the patience to look upon *them that deal treacherously*, and to hold *his peace*? when the *wicked persecutes and devours the man that is more righteous than he*? when even that part of the World which professeth the Name of God and Christ, do by their vile and obominable lives, *blaspheme that holy and glorious name whereby they are called*?

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 Every moment God hath greater  
Vol. VII. injuries done to him, and more affronts  
put upon him, than were ever offered  
to all the Sons of Men ; and surely  
provocations are tryals of patience, es-  
pecially when they are so numerous  
and so heinous ; for if offences rise ac-  
cording to the dignity of the person  
injured, and the meanness of him that  
doth the injury, then no offences are  
so great as those that are committed  
by *Men* against *God*, no affronts like  
to those which are offered to *the Divine*  
*Majesty* by the continual provocations  
of *his Creatures*. And is not this an ar-  
gument of God's patience, that the  
glorious Majesty of Heaven should  
bear such multiplied indignities from  
such vile Worms ? that he who is the  
Former of all things, should endure his  
own Creatures to rebel against him,  
and the work of his hands to strike at  
him ? that he who is our great Bene-  
factor should put up such affronts from  
those who depend upon his bounty,  
and are maintained at his charge ?  
that he, *in whose hands our breath is*,  
should suffer Men to breath out Oaths,  
and Curses, and Blasphemies against  
him ? Surely these prove the patience  
of

of God to purpose, and are equally tryals and arguments of it.  Vol. VII.

2. The Patience of God will further appear, if we consider how, notwithstanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole World, in that he doth not turn us out of Being, and *turn the wicked together into hell, with all the nations that forget God.* He is patient to the greatest part of Mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible Examples of his Justice, *that others may hear and fear, and take warning by them.* He is patient to particular persons, in that, notwithstanding our daily provocations, he *prevents us daily with the blessings* of his goodness, prolonging our lives, and vouchsafing so many favours to us, *that by this great goodness we may be led to repentance.*

But the Patience of God will more illustriously appear, if we consider these following particulars, which are so many Evidences and Instances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to spare and forbear us at all. It is patience that he doth not surprize us in the very act of sin, and let flye at us with a  
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Thunder-bolt so soon as ever we have offended ; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate person, as it did upon the *Israelites*, whilst the *meat and drink is yet in their mouths* ; that a Man is not struck dead or mad whilst he is telling a Lye ; that the Soul of the prophane and false Swearer does not expire with his Oaths and Perjuries.

2. That God spares us when it is in his power so easily to ruin us ; when he can with one word command us out of Being, and by cutting a-funder one little thread, let us drop into Hell. If God were disposed to severity, he could deal with us after another manner ; and as the expression is in the Prophet, *ease himself of his Adversaries, and be avenged of his Enemies*.

3. That God exerciseth this patience to Sinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in Arms against him, and committing Hostilities upon him ; he bears with us, even when we are challenging his Justice to punish us, and provoking his Power to destroy us.

4. That

4. That he is so very slow and unwilling to punish, and to inflict his Judgments upon us. As for eternal Punishments, God defers them a long while; and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for those temporal Judgments which God inflicts upon Sinners, he carries himself so, that we may plainly see all the signs of unwillingness that can be; he tries to prevent them, he is loth to set about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is easily perswaded and prevail'd withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorously, and to extremity; and he is soon taken off after he is engaged in it. All which are great instances and evidences of his wonderful patience to Sinners.

(I.) God's unwillingness to punish appears, in that he labours to prevent punishment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent sin, the meritorious Cause of God's Judgments. To this end he hath threatened it with severe punishments, that the dread of them may make

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us afraid to offend ; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us *a space of repentance*, and invites us earnestly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his Judgments ; he expostulates with Sinners, and reasons the case with them, as if he were more concerned not to punish, than they are not to be punished ; and thus by his earnest desire of our repentance, he shews how little he desires our ruine.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work. *Judgment* is in Scripture call'd *his strange work* ; as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the sudden. He is represented as not prepared for such a work, *Deut. 32. 41. If I whet my glittering Sword* ; as if the Instruments of Punishment were not ready for us. Nay, by a strange kind of condescension to our Capacities, and to set forth to us the patience of God, and his slowness to wrath, after the manner of Men, he is represented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to destroy us ; *Exod. 33. 2, 3.* where he tells *Moses*, that *he would send an Angel before them, but*

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*I will not go up in the midst of thee, lest I consume thee in the way.* Vol. VII.

At works of Mercy he is very ready and forward. When *Daniel* prayed for the deliverance of the People of *Israel* out of Captivity, the Angel tells him, that *at the beginning of his supplication, the commandment came forth*, to bring him a promise of their deliverance. The mercy of God many times prevents our Prayers, and out-runs our Wishes and Desires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he passeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that by our repentance we will prevent his Judgments; *he hearkned and heard* (saith God in the Prophet *Jeremiah*) *but they spake not aright, no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?* He is represented as waiting and listning, to hear if any penitent word would drop from them; he gives the Sinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to consider what he hath done, and space to reason himself into repentance. For this reason the Judgments of God do often follow the sins of Men at a great distance, otherwise he could easily

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Vol. VII.  make them mend their pace, and consume us in a moment.

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance, *Amos 11. 8, 9. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* He is represented as making many essays and offers before he came to it. *Psal. 106. 26. Many a time lifted he up his hand in the wilderness to destroy them.* He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be so severe. God witholds his Judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the Expression is, *Jer. 6. 11. till he can forbear no longer. Jer. 44. 22. So that the Lord could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations, which ye have committed.*

(4.) God is easily prevailed upon not to punish. When he seemed resolved upon it, to destroy the murmuring *Israelites*, yet how often, at the intercession of *Moses*, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to spare a very wicked People, appears by the instance of *Sodom*, where if there had been *but ten righteous*

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ous persons, he would not have destroyed them for the ten's sake. Yea, when his truth seemed to have been pawn'd, (at least in the apprehension of his Prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the case of *Nineveh*. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! with what joy does he tell the Prophet the news of *Ahab's* humiliation! Seest thou how *Ahab* humbleth himself? Because he humbleth himself, I will not bring the evil in his days.

(5.) When he punisheth, he does it very seldom rigorously, and to extremity, not so much as we deserve; *Psal. 103. 10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* Nor so much as he can; he doth not let loose the fierceness of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath; *Psal. 78. 38. Being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.*

(6.) After he hath begun to punish, and is engaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous instance of this, *2. Sam. 24.* when God had sent three days Pestilence upon

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If-



Vol. VII. *Israel for David's sin in numbring the People, and at the end of the third day, the Angel of the Lord had stretch- ed forth his hand over Jerusalem to de- stroy it, upon the Prayer of David, it is said, that the Lord repented of the e- vil, and said to the Angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. Nay, so ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he sets a high value upon those who stand in the gap to turn away his wrath; Numb. 25. 11, 12, 13. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, that I consumed them not in my jealousy; wherefore behold I give unto him my covenant of peace, and to his seed after him, because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the chil- dren of Israel. That which God va- lues in this action of Phinehas, next to his zeal for him, is, that he turned a- way his wrath, and made an atonement for the Children of Israel.*

5. and Lastly, The patience of God will yet appear with further advan- tage, if we consider some eminent and remarkable Instances of it; which are so much the more considerable, be- cause they are instances, not only of God's

God's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many persons. Vol. VII.

*The long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah upon the whole World, as is probably conjectured, for the space of an hundred and twenty years.*

God bore with the People of *Israel* in the Wilderness, after they had tempted him ten times, for the space of forty Years; *Acts 13. 18.* And about

*the space of forty years suffered he their manners in the Wilderness.* And this

instance of God's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it

with the great impatience of that People; if they did but want Flesh

or Water, they were out of patience with God; when *Moses* was in the

Mount with God but forty days, they presently fall to make new Gods; they

had not the patience of *forty days*, and yet God bore their manners *forty years*.

God had spared *Niniveh* for some Ages, and when his patience was even

expired, and he seems to have past a final Sentence upon it, yet he grants

a Reprieve for *forty days*, that they might sue out their Pardon in that

time, and they did so; *they turned from their evil ways, and God turned*

*from*

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from

*from the evil he said he would do to them,*  
 Vol. VII. *and he did it not.*

But the most remarkable instance of God's long-suffering is to the *Jews*, if we consider it with all the circumstances of it; after they had rejected the Son of God, notwithstanding the purity of his Doctrine, and the power of his Miracles; after they had unjustly condemned, and cruelly murdered the Lord of life, yet the patience of God respited the ruin of that People forty Years.

Besides all these, there are many instances of God's patience to particular Persons; but it were endless to enumerate these; every one of us may be an instance to our selves of God's long-suffering.

I shall only add, as a further advantage to set off the patience of God to Sinners, that his forbearance is so great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own Servants. *Job*, who was so patient a Man himself, thought much at it; *Job* 21. 7, 8. *Wherefore doth the wicked live, yea, become old? Their seed is established in their sight, and their posterity before their eyes. Jonah* challengeth God for it, *Ch.* 4. 2. *Was*

Was not this that which I said when I was yet in my own country? and therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, because I knew thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, &c. Jonah had observed God to be so prone to this, that he was loth to be sent upon his Message, lest God should discredit his Prophet, in not being so good (shall I say) so severe as his word. Vol. VII.

I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, viz. The great patience and long-suffering of God to Mankind.





# SERMON VII.

## The Patience of God.

2 PET. III. 9.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, as some Men count slackness ; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*

**I** Have made entrance into these words, in the handling of which, I propos'd to do these *three* things.

*First*, To consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an Attribute and Perfection of the Divine Nature ; *God is long suffering to us-ward.*

*Secondly*, To shew that the Patience of God, and the delay of his Judgment, is no just ground why Sinners should

*should hope for impunity ; God is not  
Vol. VII. slack concerning his promise, as some men  
count slackness.*

*Thirdly,* To consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards Mankind ; *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* I have already spoken to the

*First* of these, namely, The patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an Attribute and Perfection of the Divine Nature. I proceed now to the

*Second* thing I proposed, namely, To shew that the Patience of God, and the delay of Judgment, is no just ground why Sinners should hope for impunity ; *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness ;* that is, as the *Scoffers* here mentioned by the Apostle, did ignorantly and maliciously reason, that because our Lord delayed his coming to Judgment so long, therefore he would never come.

There was indeed some pretence for this Objection, because the Christians did generally apprehend, that the day of Judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the

the destruction of Jerusalem; and it seems the Disciples themselves were of that perswasion before our Saviour's death, when our Saviour discoursing to them of the destruction of the Temple, they put these two questions to him, *Mat. 24. 3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? When shall these things be?* That is, the things he had been speaking of immediately before, *viz.* the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dissolution of the Temple; that is plainly the meaning of the first question, to which they subjoined another, *And what shall be the sign of thy coming?* that is to Judgment; *and of the end of the world?* which in all probability, was added to the former; because they supposed that the one was presently to follow the other, and therefore the same answer would serve them both; and it appears by our Saviour's answer, that he was not concerned to rectifie them in this mistake, which might be of good use to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the Gospel, since there

Vol VII.



**Vol VII.** there was like to be so little time for it; and likewise to wean their affections from this World, which they thought to be so near an end,

One thing indeed our Saviour says, which (had they not been prepossessed with another Opinion) does sufficiently intimate that there might be a considerable space of time, betwixt the destruction of *Jerusalem* and the day of Judgment; and this we find only in *St. Luke*, Ch. 21. 24. where speaking of the Miseries and Calamities that should come upon the *Jews*, he says, *They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be carried into captivity into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* So that here were a great many Events foretold, betwixt the destruction of *Jerusalem* and the end of the World, the accomplishment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the Event of things, *Jerusalem* being at this day still trodden down by the *Gentiles*, and the *Jews* still continuing dispersed over the world: but the Disciples it seems did not much mind this, being carryed away with a prejudicate conceit that the

the end of the World would happen before the end of that Age; in which they were much confirmed, by what our Saviour, after his Resurrection, said of St. *John*, upon occasion of Peter's question concerning him; *John* 21. 21, 22. *Lord, what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Upon which words of our Saviour concerning him, St. *John* himself adds, v. 23. *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die, that is, that he should live till the coming of our Lord, and then be taken up with him into Heaven; from all which they probably (as they thought) concluded, that the day of Judgment would happen before the end of that Age, whilst St. John was alive; but St. John, who writ last of all the Evangelists (as Eusebius tells us) and lived till after the destruction of Jerusalem, as he acquaints us with this mistake, which was currant among the Christians, so he takes care to rectifie it, telling us, That Jesus said not, he should not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? He tells us, that our*  
Sa-

Saviour did not affirm that *he should not die*; but to repress St Peter's Curiosity, he says, *If it were my pleasure that he should not die at all, but live till I come to Judgment, what is that to thee?* And St. Peter likewise (or whoever was the Author of this second Epistle, or at least of this third Chapter, which seems to be a new Epistle by it self) takes notice of this mistake, about the nearness of the day of Judgment, as that which gave occasion to these *Scoffers* to deride the expectation of a future Judgment among the Christians, because they had been already deceived about the time of it; and this the *Scoffers* twitted them with in that Question, *Where is the promise of his coming?* And therefore the learned *Grotius* conjectures very probably, that this last Epistle (contained in the third Chapter) was written after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, which was the time fixt for Christ's coming to Judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this Scoff till after that time. St. Peter indeed did not live so long, and therefore *Grotius* thinks, that this Epistle was writ by *Simeon*, or *Simon*,  
 ¶ who



who was Successor of St. *James*, in the Bishoprick of *Jerusalem*, and lived to the time of *Trajan*. Vol. VII.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might understand where the ground and force of this Scoff lay ; namely in this, That because the Christians had generally been very confident, that the coming of Christ to Judgment would be presently after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future Judgment ; because they might be deceiv'd in that, as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very fallly, because our Saviour had positively and peremptorily foretold his coming to Judgment, but had never fixt and determined the time of it ; nay, so far was he from that, that he had plainly told his Disciples, that the precise time of the day of Judgment God had reserved as a Secret to himself, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the Angels in Heaven, nor to the Son himself ; *Mark* 13. 32, 33. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man,*



*W* no not the angels which are in heaven,  
 Vol. VII. neither the Son, but the Father. Take  
 ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not  
 when the time is. So that if they pre-  
 sumed to make any conjectures about  
 the time when the day of Judgment  
 would be, they did it without any  
 Warrant from our Lord; it was great  
 presumption in them to determine the  
 time of it, when our Saviour had so  
 expressly told them, that the Father  
 had reserved this as a Secret, which  
 he had never communicated to any,  
 and therefore if they were mistaken  
 about it, it was no wonder. But their  
 mistake in this, was no prejudice to  
 the truth of our Saviour's clear Predi-  
 ction of a future Judgment, without  
 any determination of the time of it,  
 for that might be at some thousands of  
 Years distance, and yet be certain  
 for all that; and the delay of it was  
 no sign of the uncertainty of our Savi-  
 our's Prediction concerning it, but on-  
 ly of God's great Patience and long-  
 suffering to Sinners, in expectation of  
 their Repentance; *God is not slack con-  
 cerning his promise, as some men count  
 slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward.*  
 And this brings me to the

*Third.*

Third, and last Particular in the Text, namely, The true Reason of God's Patience and long-suffering to Mankind ; *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* And for this St. Peter cites St. Paul, v. 15th of this Chapter ; *And account that the long-suffering of the Lord is sal- vation, that is, that the great End and Design of God's goodness and long-suffering to Sinners, is that they may repent and be saved ; Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom gi- ven unto him, hath written unto you.* Now these words are not expressly found in St. Paul's Writings ; but the Sense and Effect of them is, viz. in Rom. 2. 4. *Despiseest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suf- fering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ?* God hath a very gracious and merciful design in his Patience to Sinners ; he is good, that he may make us so ; and that *his goodness may lead us to repentance* ; he de- fers Punishment on purpose, that he may give Men time to bethink them-  
N selves

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Waveselves, and to return to a better Mind ;  
*He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent,* says the Son of Sirach. The Patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of those, who are not desperately and resolutely wicked.

This is the primary End and Intention of God's Patience to Sinners; and if he fail of this End through our hardness and impenitency, he hath other Ends which he will infallibly attain. He will hereby glorifie the riches of his Mercy, and vindicate the righteousness of his Justice; the damned in Hell shall acknowledge, that the Patience of God was great Mercy and Goodness to them, tho' they abused it; for God does not lose the glory of his Patience, tho' we lose the benefit of it, and he will make it subvervient to his Justice one way or other. Those great Offenders whom he spares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he many times makes use of, as Instruments for the punishing of others, as *rods of his wrath for the discipline of the world*; and he often reserves those who are incorrigibly bad for a more remarkable ruin. But however, they are reserved to the

the Judgment of the great Day ; and if after God hath exercised much Patience towards Sinners in this World, he inflict Punishment on them in the next, it must be acknowledg'd to be most just ; for what can he do less, than to condemn those who would not be saved , and to make them miserable, who so obstinately refused to be happy ?

Before I come to apply this Discourse concerning the Patience and long-suffering of God to Sinners, I must remove an Objection or two.

I. The Severity of God to some Sinners in this Life, and to all impenitent Sinners in the next, seems to contradict what hath been said concerning God's Patience and long-suffering.

As for the severity of God towards impenitent Sinners in the next Life, this doth not at all contradict the Patience of God , because the very nature of Patience, and forbearance, and long-suffering, does suppose a determinate time, and that they will not last always ; this Life is the day of God's Patience, and in the next World his Justice and Severity will take place.

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And

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And therefore the punishment of Sinners in another World, after God hath tryed them in this, and expected their Repentance, is no ways contrary to his Patience and Goodness, and very agreeable to his Wisdom and Justice ; for it is no part of Goodness, to see it self perpetually abused ; it is not Patience, but stupidity and insensibleness, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and just Laws for ever despised and contemned.

And as for his Severity to some Sinners in this Life ; as to *Lot's Wife*, to the *Israelites* that gathered Sticks on the Sabbath-day, to *Nadab and Abihu*, to *Uzza*, to *Ananias and Sapphira*, and to *Herod Agrippa* ; in all which Instances God seems to have made quick work, and to have executed Judgment speedily ; to these I answer, That this Severity of God to some few, doth rather magnify his Patience to the rest of Mankind ; he may be severe to some few, for Example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better use of his Patience, and not to trespass so boldly upon it ; and perhaps he hath exercised much Patience already

ready towards those, to whom at last he is so severe ; as is plain in the case of *Herod*, and it may well be supposed in most of the other Instances ; or else the Sin so suddenly and severely punished, was very heinous and presumptuous, of a contagious and spreading nature, and of dangerous Example. *Lot's* Wife sinned very presumptuously against an expresse and an easie Command, and whilst God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of *Nadab* and *Abihu*, and of the Man that gathered Sticks on the Sabbath-day, were presently after the giving of the Law ; in which case great severity is necessary ; and that of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, at the first publishing of the Gospel, that the Majesty of the Divine Spirit, and the Authority of the first publishers of it might not be contemned. That of *Uzza* was upon the return of the Ark of God from among the *Philistines*, that the People might not lose their reverence for it after it had been taken Captive ; so that these necessary Severities to a few, in comparison of those many that are warned by them, are rather Arguments of

N 3

God's

God's Patience, than Objections against  
Vol. VII. it.

II. It is objected, That if God do not desire the ruin of Sinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to pass, that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath resisted his Will? To this I answer.

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this. He can, if he pleaseth, conquer and reclaim the most obstinate Spirits; he is able *out of stones to raise up children unto Abraham*. And sometimes he exerts his Omnipotence herein, as in the Conversion of St. Paul, in a kind of violent and irresistible manner: but he hath nowhere declared, that he will do this to all; and we see plainly in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be said, *not to be willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*, when he does on his part what is sufficient to that end; and upon this ground, the Scripture every where represents God as desiring the repentance of Sinners, and their obedience to his Laws; Deut. 5. 29. *O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me,*  
and

and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them ! So Jer. 13. Vol. VII.

27. O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean ? when shall it once be ? Is. 5. 3, 4. we find God there solemnly appealing to the People of Israel, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done ; And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it ? wherefore when I looked it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ? God may justly look for the Fruits of Repentance and Obedience from those, to whom he affords a sufficiency of Means to that End. And if so, then

3. The true Reason why Men do not repent, but perish, is because they are obstinate, and will not repent ; and this account the Scripture every where gives of the impenitency of Men, and the ruin consequent upon it. Psal. 81. 13. O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my statutes ! But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. Ezek. 33. 11. Why will



*ye dye, O house of Israel: Prov. 1. 29, 30, 31. They hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsels, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.* The ruin of Sinners does not proceed from the counsel of God; but from their own choice. And so likewise our Saviour every where chargeth the ruin and destruction of the *Jews* upon their own wilful obstinacy.

The Inferences from this Discourse concerning the Patience and long-suffering of God towards Mankind, shall be these three.

I. To stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great Patience of God towards us, notwithstanding our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to our selves those words, *Lam. 3. 22. It is of the Lords mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are renewed every morning.* When ever we sin (and we provoke God every day) it is of his Patience that we are not destroyed; and when we sin again, this is a new and greater Instance

stance of God's Patience. The mercies of God's Patience are no more to be numbred than our sins ; we may say with *David*, *How great is the sum of them ?* The goodness of God in sparing us, is in some respect greater than his goodness in creating us ; because he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to destroy us.

II. Let us propound the Patience of God for a pattern to our selves. *Plutarch* says, " That God sets forth himself in the midst of the World for our Imitation, and propounds to us the Example of his Patience, to teach us not to revenge Injuries hastily upon one another.

III. Let us comply with the design of God's Patience and long-suffering towards us, which is *to bring us to repentance*. Men are very apt to abuse it to a quite contrary purpose, to the encouraging themselves in their evil ways. So *Solomon* observes, *Eccl. 8.*

11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil :* But this is very false reasoning ; for the Patience of God is an enemy

  
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my to sin, as well as his Justice, and the design of it is not to countenance sin, but to convert the Sinner; *Rom. 2. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* Patience in God should produce Repentance in us; and we should look upon it as an opportunity given us by God to repent and be saved; *2 Pet. 3. 15. Account that the long-suffering of God is salvation.* They that do not improve the Patience of God to their own Salvation, mistake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are so far from making this use of it, that they presume upon it, and sin with more courage and confidence because of it; but that we may be sensible of the danger of this, I will offer these *two or three* Considerations.

I. That nothing is more provoking to God, than the abuse of his Patience. God's Patience waits for our Repentance, and all long attendance, even of Inferiors upon their Superiors, hath something in it that is grievous; how much more grievous and provoking must it be to the great God, after he hath

hath laid out upon us all the riches of his Goodness and long-suffering, to have that despised ! after his Patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thrust away with contempt, but to have that which should be an argument to us to leave our sins, abused into an encouragement to continue in them ! God takes an account of all the days of his Patience and forbearance ; *Luke 13. 7. Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit, and find none ; cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?*

2. Consider that the Patience of God will have an end. Tho' God suffers long, he will not suffer always ; we may provoke God so long, till he can forbear no longer without injury and dishonour to his Wisdom, and Justice, and Holiness ; and God will not suffer one Attribute to wrong the rest ; his Wisdom will determine the length of his Patience ; when his Patience is to no purpose, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his Wisdom will then put a period to it ; then the Patience of his Mercy will determine.

*How often would I have gathered you, and you would not ? therefore your house is left unto*



*unto you desolate.* And the Patience  
 Vol. VII. of God's Judgments will then deter-  
 mine. *Why should they be smitten any  
 more? they will revolt more and more.*  
 Yea, Patience it self, after a long and  
 fruitless expectation, will expire. A  
 Sinner may continue so long impeni-  
 tent, till the Patience of God, as I  
 may say, grows impatient, and then  
 our ruin will make haste, and destru-  
 ction *will come upon us in a moment.*  
 If Men will not come to repentance,  
*the day of the Lord will come as a thief  
 in the night,* as it follows in the next  
 Verse after the Text ; the Judgment  
 of God will suddenly surprize those  
 who will not be gained by his Pa-  
 tience.

3. Consider that nothing will more  
 hasten and aggravate our ruin, than  
 the abuse of God's Patience. All this  
 time of God's Patience, his Wrath is  
 coming towards us, and the more we  
 presume upon it, the sooner it will o-  
 vertake us ; *Luke 12. 45, 46. The  
 wicked servant, who said his Lord delayed  
 his coming, and fell to rioting and drunk-  
 enness,* our Saviour tells us, *That the  
 Lord of that servant will come in a day  
 when he looks not for him.*

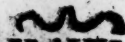
And

And it will aggravate our ruin ; the longer punishment is a coming the heavier it will be ; those things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution ; the weight of God's wrath will make amends for the slowness of it, and the delay of Judgment will be fully recompensed in the dreadfulfulness of it when it comes.

Let all those consider this who go on in their sin, and are deaf to the voice of God's Patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of Vengeance a coming upon those who trifle away this day of God's Patience ; nothing will sooner and more inflame the wrath and displeasure of God against us, than his abused Patience, and the despised riches of his Goodness. As Oyl, tho' it be soft and smooth, yet when it is once inflamed, burns most fiercely ; so the Patience of God, when it is abused, turns into Fury, and his mildest Attributes into the greatest Severities.

And if the Patience of God do not bring us to Repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin. After God hath kept a long indignation

nation in his Breast, it will at length  
 Vol. VII. break forth with the greater violence.  
 The Patience of God increaseth his  
 Judgments by an incredible kind of  
 proportion; *Levit 26. 18. And if you  
 will still (says God to the People of  
 Israel) walk contrary to me, and if ye  
 will not be reformed by all these things,  
 I will punish you yet seven times more.  
 And v. 27. I will bring seven times more  
 plagues upon you, according to your sins.*  
 At first God's Justice accuseth Sinners;  
 but after a long time of Patience, his  
 Mercy comes in against us, and in-  
 stead of staying his hand, adds weight  
 to his blows; *Rom. 9. 22. What if  
 God willing to shew his wrath, and to  
 make his power known, endured with much  
 long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted  
 for destruction. They, upon whom the  
 Patience of God hath no good effect,  
 are vessels of wrath, preapred and fit-  
 ted for destruction. If ever God dis-  
 play his wrath, and make his anger  
 known, he will do it in the most se-  
 vere manner upon those who have  
 despised and abused his Patience; for  
 these, in a more peculiar manner, do  
 treasure up for themselves wrath against  
 the day of wrath, and the revelation of the  
 righteous judgment of God.* To

To conclude, Let us all take a re-  
view of our lives, and consider how  Vol VII.  
long the Patience of God hath waited  
upon us, and born with us ; with some  
twenty, forty, perhaps sixty Years,  
and longer. Do we not remember  
how God spared us in such a danger,  
when we gave our selves for lost ?  
and how he recovered us in such a  
sickness, when the Physician gave us  
up for gone ? and what use we made  
of this Patience and long-suffering of  
God towards us ? It is the worst tem-  
per in the World, not to be melted by  
kindness, not to be obliged by bene-  
fits, not to be tamed by gentle usage.  
He that is not wrought upon, neither  
by the patience of his Mercy, nor by  
the patience of his Judgments, his  
case is desperate and past remedy.  
*Consider this all ye that forget God, lest  
his Patience turn into Fury ; for God  
is not slack, as some men count slackness ;  
but long-suffering to sinners, not willing  
that any should perish, but that all should  
come to repentance.*

S E R-





# SERMON VIII.

The Long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. VIII. II.

*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

Nothing is more evident, than that the world lies in wickedness, and that iniquity every where abounds; and yet nothing is more certain, than that God will not acquit the guilty, and let sin go unpunished. All Men, excepting those who have offer'd notorious violence to the light of their own Minds, and have put the candle of the Lord, which is in them, under a bushel, do believe, that there is a God in the World, to  
 O whose

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whose holy Nature and Will sin is perfectly contrary, *who loves righteousness and hates iniquity*, that his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings, that there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. All Men, except those whose Consciences are seared, as it were with a hot Iron, are convinc'd of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one whether *men serve God or serve him not*, do well, or live wickedly. Every Man from his inward Sense and Experience is satisfied of his own Liberty, and that God lays upon Men no necessity of sinning, but that when ever we do amiss, it is our own act, and we chuse to do so; and so far is he from giving the least countenance to sin, that he hath given all imaginable discouragement to it, by the most severe and terrible threatnings, such as one would think sufficient to deter Men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the World; and to make his Threatnings the more awful and effectual, his Providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable Instances of his Justice and Severity upon notorious Offenders, even

ven in this life: and yet for all this, <sup>Vol VII.</sup> Men do and will sin; nay, they are zealously set and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives sinners such heart, and makes them so resolute and undaunted in so dangerous a course. *Solomon* gives us this account of it, because the Punishments and Judgments of God follow the sins of Men so slowly, and are long before they overtake the sinner, *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.*

The scope of the wise Man's discourse is this, That by reason of God's forbearance and long-suffering toward sinners in this life, 'tis not so easie to discern the difference between them and other Men; this life is the day of God's Patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now because God doth defer and moderate the punishment of sinners in this World, and reserve the weight of his Judgments to the next, because through the long-suffering of God many great sinners live and dye without any remarkable te-



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 Vol VII. testimony of God's wrath and displeasure against them, *therefore the hearts of the children of men are fully set in them to do evil.*

If we render the Text word for word from the Original, it runs thus, *Because nothing is done as a recompence to an evil work, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are full in them to do evil;* that is, because Men are not opposed and contradicted in their evil ways, because Divine Justice doth not presently check and controul sinners, because sentence is not immediately past upon them, and judgment executed, *therefore the heart of the sons of men is full in them to do evil,* that is, therefore Men grow bold and presumptuous in sin; for the Hebrew word which we render, *is fully set in them,* we find *Esth.* 7. 5. where *Ahasbuerus* says concerning *Haman*, *Who is he? and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? Whose heart was full to do so, Fervet in iis cor filiorum hominum;* so some render it, *the hearts of men boil with wickedness,* are so full of it, that it works over. Men are resolute in an evil course, *their hearts are strengthened and hardened in them to do evil,* so others

thers translate the words. The Translation of the LXX is very emphatical, ἐπὶ ἀνεσφορῇ τῆς καρδίας, *the heart of the sons of men is fully persuaded and assured to do evil.* All these Translations agree in the main scope and sense, viz. That sinners are very apt to presume upon the long-suffering of God, and to abuse it, to the hardning and encouraging of themselves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I shall

*First*, Briefly shew that it is so.

*Secondly*, Whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretences and colours of reason, Men encourage themselves in sin, from the Patience of God.

*Thirdly*, I shall endeavour to answer an Objection about this matter.

*First*, That Men are very apt to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the encouraging and hardning of themselves in an evil course, the experience of the World in all Ages does give abundant testimony. Thus it was with the old World, *when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he was preparing an Ark, for the space of a hundred and twenty years,* 1 Pet. 3. 20. For the wickedness of Man, which

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was great upon the Earth, a general deluge was threatned, but God was patient, and delayed his Judgment a great while; hereupon they grew secure in their impenitency, and went on in their course, as if they had no apprehension of danger, no fear of the Judgment threatned. So our Saviour tells us, *Matth. 24. 38, 39. As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away. And so it was with Sodom, Luke 17. 28. And likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. And so our Saviour tells us it will be in the end of the World; Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. So likewise the Apostle St. Paul, Rom. 2. 4, 5. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. The goodness*



ness and long-suffering of God, which ought in all reason to lead Men to repentance, is to many an occasion of greater hardness and impenitency. So also St. Peter foretels, 2 Pet. 3. 3. that *in the last days there should come scoffers, who should walk after their own hearts lusts, saying, Where is the promise of his coming?* And we see in daily experience, that the greatest part of sinners grow more obstinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's Patience, and because he delays the punishment due to them for their sins. Let us consider in the

*Second place*, whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretence and colour of Reason Men encourage themselves in sin, from the long-suffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness, and from *an evil heart of unbelief*, from the temptation and suggestion of the Devil, one of whose great arts it is, to make Men question the threatnings of God, and to insinuate, as he did to our first Parents, either that he hath not denounced such threatnings, or that he will

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not



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not execute them so severely. All these Causes do concur to the producing this monstrous Effect; but that which I design to enquire into, is, from what pretence of Reason, grounded upon the long-suffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. For when the wise Man saith, that *because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*, he does not intend to insinuate, that God's long-suffering fills the hearts of Men with wicked designs and resolutions, and does by a proper and direct efficacy, harden sinners in their course; but that wicked Men upon some account or other, do take occasion from the long-suffering of God, to harden themselves in sin; they draw false conclusions from it to impose upon themselves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they see something in the forbearance of God and his delay of punishment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil course, notwithstanding the threatnings of God.

And

And therefore I shall endeavour to shew, what those false conclusions are, which wicked Men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them; and I shall rank them under *two* Heads; those which are more gross and atheistical, and those which are not so gross, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad Men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment (which we who believe a God, call the patience or long-suffering of God) are these *three*; either that there is no God; or if there be, that there is no Providence; or that there is no difference between Good and Evil.

I shall speak more briefly of these, because I hope there are but few in the World of such irregular and besotted understandings, as to make such Inferences as these from the delay of punishment.


1<sup>st</sup>. From hence some would fain conclude, that there is no God. That some are so absurd as to reason in this man-

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manner, the Scripture tells us, *Psal.*  
*14. 1. The fool hath said in his heart,*  
*There is no God: they are corrupt, and*  
*have done abominable works.* Now the  
 Argument that these Men frame to  
 themselves, is this; God doth not  
 take a speedy course with sinners, and  
 revenge himself immediately upon the  
 workers of Iniquity, therefore there  
 is no God; for if there were, he  
 would shew himself, and not bear  
 the affronts of sinners, when it is so  
 easie for him to vindicate himself by a  
 swift and speedy Vengeance. Thus  
 the Poet represents the Atheist argu-  
 ing, *Nullos esse deos, inane cælum, affir-*  
*mat Selius, probatque, quod se factum,*  
*dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* "Selius  
 "affirms there are no Gods, and that  
 "Heaven is an empty place, and  
 "proves it, because whilst he denys  
 "God, he sees himself in a very happy  
 "and prosperous condition.

And here it is worthy our notice,  
 at what a contradictory rate these  
 Men reason. First they would have  
 no God, lest he should be just and  
 punish them as they deserve; and  
 then in another mood, they would  
 have him to be nothing but Justice and  
 Seve-

Severity, lest there should be a God ;   
as if no other Notion could be framed Vol. VII.  
of the Divine Nature, but of a rash  
Fury, and impetuous Revenge, and  
an impotent Passion, which when it  
is offended and provoked, cannot con-  
tain it self, and forbear punishment  
for a moment. Justice is not such a  
Perfection as doth necessarily exclude  
Wisdom, and Goodness, and Patience ;  
it doth in no wise contradict the Perfe-  
ction of the Divine Nature, to bear  
with sinners in expectation of their  
repentance and amendment ; or if  
God foresees their final impenitency,  
to respite their punishment to the  
most fit and convenient season. God  
may suffer long, and yet be resolved,  
if sinners persist in the abuse of his  
Goodness and Patience, to execute  
Vengeance upon them in due time.  
It is a pitiful ground of Atheism,  
that because God is so much better  
than wicked Men deserve, they will  
not allow him to be at all.

2dly, Others infer from the delay  
of punishment, that there is no Pro-  
vidence that administers the Affairs of  
the World, and regards the good and  
bad Actions of Men. For tho' the Be-  
ing



ing of God be acknowledged, yet if  
 Vol. VII. he do not regard what is done here  
 below, nor concern himself in humane  
 Affairs, sinners are as safe and free to  
 do what they please, as if there were  
 no God; and upon this ground, the  
 Scripture tells us, many encourage  
 themselves in their wickedness; *Psal.*  
*64. 5. They encourage themselves in an*  
*evil matter, they commune of laying*  
*snakes privately; for they say, Who shall*  
*see them? And more exprelly, Psal. 94.*  
*4, 5, 6, 7. How long shall the workers of*  
*iniquity boast themselves? They break in*  
*pieces thy People, O Lord, and afflict thine*  
*heritage, and slay the widow and the*  
*stranger, and murder the fatherless; and*  
*yet they say, The Lord shall not see, nei-*  
*ther shall the God of Jacob regard it.*  
 And if this were so, well might they  
 encourage themselves. If it were true  
 which *Epicurus* saith, "That God  
 "takes no knowledge of the Actions  
 "of Men, that he is far removed from  
 "us, and contented with himself, and  
 "not at all concerned in what we  
 "do; If this were true, the Inference  
 which *Lucretius* makes, were very  
 just; *Quare relligio pedibus subjecta vi-*  
*cissim Obseritur;* "Men might trample  
 "Re-

" Religion under their Feet, and live  
" without any regard to the Laws of Vol. VII.  
" it.

But let us see how they infer this from the long-suffering of God, that he neglects the Affairs of the World, and hath no consideration of the Actions of Men, because they see the ungodly to prosper in the World, equally with others that are strictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times to be in a more prosperous and flourishing condition; *they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men.* So that if there be a God, it seems (say they) that he connives at the Crimes of Men, and *looks on upon them that deal treacherously, and holds his peace, whilst the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than himself;* as the Prophet expresseth it, *Hab. 1. 13.*

For answer to this, I shall only give this reasonable and credible Account of the long-suffering of God, and the impunity of wicked Men in this Life, which not only the Scripture gives us, but the Heathen were able to give from the light of Nature, and is agreeable to the common Sense of Mankind; namely, That this Life is a state of probation,

**Vol. VII** *bation and tryal, wherein God suffers men to walk in their own ways without any visible check and restraint, and does not usually inflict present and remarkable punishments upon them for their evil deeds; because this being a state of tryal of the dispositions and manners of Men, is rather the proper season of Patience, than of punishments and rewards; and therefore it is very reasonable to suppose, that God reserves sinners for a solemn and publick Tryal, at the great Assises of the World, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his Justice, upon the despisers of his Patience and long-suffering, when he will make his judgment to break forth as the light, and his righteousness as the noon day. In the mean time the providence of God, when he sees it fit, gives some remarkable Instances of his Justice upon great and notorious Offenders in this life, as a pledge and earnest of a future Judgment; and these sometimes more general, as in the destruction of the old World, by an universal Deluge, when he saw the wickedness of men to be great upon the earth. And such was that terrible Vengeance which*

which was poured down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Cities about them; *which, as St. Jude tells us, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, that is, of a perpetual destruction by Fire.*

3dly, Another gross and Atheistical Inference, which Men are apt to make from the delay of punishment, is, that there is no such difference of *good and evil* as is pretended; because they do not see the good and bad Actions of Men differenced in their rewards, because Divine Justice doth not presently manifest it self, and *every transgression and disobedience* doth not immediately receive a just recompence of reward, therefore they cannot believe, that the difference between *good and evil* is so great and evident.

For answer to this. Not to insist upon the difference which the Providence of God sometimes makes between them in this life, I appeal to the Consciences of Men, whether they do not secretly and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between *good and evil*. Are not the worst of Men apt to conceive better hopes of success, when they are about a just and honest



**W**orst undertaking, than when they  
Vol. VII. are engaged in a wicked design? Do  
not bad Men feel a secret shame and  
horror, when no Eye sees them, and  
the wickedness they are about to com-  
mit doth not fall under the cognisance  
and censure of any human Court or  
Tribunal? Have they not many checks  
and rebukes in their own Spirits,  
much disturbance and confusion of  
Mind, when they are enterprising a  
wicked thing? And does not this  
plainly argue, that they are guilty to  
themselves, that they are about some-  
thing which they ought not to do?

'Tis very true that most Men are  
more sensible of the Evil of an Action,  
when they feel the ill effects and con-  
sequences of it, and suffer the punish-  
ment that is due to it: but yet the  
sense of *good* and *evil* is so deeply im-  
prest upon humane Nature, that I  
think no Man, remaining a *Man*, can  
quite deface and blot out the difference  
of *good* and *evil*. So that if Men will  
but attend to the natural dictates and  
suggestions of their own Minds, they  
cannot possibly infer from the delay  
of punishment, that there is no diffe-  
rence of *good* and *evil*.

But

But because those who argue thus are but few in comparison, there being not many in the World arrived to that degree of blindness and height of impiety, as to disbelieve a God and a Providence, and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of Conscience, as to have lost all sense of good and evil; therefore I shall rather insist

II. Upon those kind of Reasonings which are more ordinary and common among bad Men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting Perdition; and they are such as these.

1. *Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed*, therefore Sin is not so great an Evil.

2. Therefore God is not so highly offended and provoked by it. Or,


3. God is not so severe in his own Nature, as he is commonly represented.

4. Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain.

5. Or however it is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future Repentance, in our old Age, or at the hour of Death; by some such false reasonings as these,

P

which

Vol. VII.  which Men think may probably be collected from the Patience and long-suffering of God, they harden and encourage themselves in an evil course.

1. Because the punishment of sin is deferr'd, therefore they conclude it is not so great an Evil ; they do not feel the ill Effects of it at present, all things go well and prosperously with them, no less than with those who are so strict and conscientious ; and therefore they hope there is no such great Evil in Sin, as melancholy People are apt to fancy to themselves. For answer to this,

(1.) Consider seriously what Sin is ; and then thou wilt see reason enough to call it a great Evil. To sin against God, is to contemn the greatest Authority in the World, to contradict the greatest Holiness and Purity, to abuse the greatest Goodness, and to provoke Almighty Justice to take Vengeance upon thee, and to make thee as miserable as thou art capable of being. To sin against God, is to be disobedient to thy Sovereign, and unthankful to thy best Benefactor, and to act contrary to the greatest Obligations, against thy best Reason

son and truest Interest ; to disoblige thy kindest Friend , and to gratifie thy worst and bitterest Enemy ; it is to disorder thy self, to create perpetual disquiet to thy own Mind, and to do the greatest mischief possible to thy self ; to deprive thy self of the greatest Happiness, and to draw down upon thy self extream and eternal Misery. And what do we call a great Evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds, and all the aggravations of Evil that can be, and hath all the circumstances of ugliness and deformity in it that can be imagined ?

(2.) What ever Sin be in it self, yet from hence we can in no wise conclude, that it is not a great Evil, because the punishment of it is deferr'd for a while; from hence indeed it follows, that God is very good in deferring the punishment which is due to thee for thy sins, but by no means that Sin is not very Evil. The Reprieve of a Traytor does indeed argue the goodness and clemency of the Prince, but doth not at all abate of the heinousness of the Crime for which he is sentenced. The great Evil of Sin is evident, because the holy and just God hath for-



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bidden it, and declared his hatred and detestation of it, and threatned it with most severe and direful punishments ; but that God respites the punishment which is due to sin, and does not immediately take Vengeance upon Sinners, but affords them a space, and means, and opportunity of repentance, this doth not at all lessen the Evil of Sin, but is rather an aggravation of it ; that we should offend and provoke that God, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us, so very loth to bring those Evils upon us, which we are so rash and forward to pull down upon our selves.

2. If God doth not immediately punish sin upon the commission of it, and instantly let flye at the Sinner, this they would construe to be a sign that he is not so highly offended and provok'd by it ; if he were, he would manifest his displeasure against it, by the sudden and violent effusions of his Wrath. For answer to this, I desire these *two* things may be considered.

(1.) That God himself in his word every where plainly declares to us his great displeasure against sin ; *Psal. 5. 4, 5. Thou art not a God that hast pleasure*

*draw from God's long-suffering.*

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*sure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness.* The words are a *peu moins*, and less is spoken than is meant and intended, *viz.* That God is so far from taking pleasure in the sins of Men, that he is highly displeased at them, and bears an implacable hatred against them.

And do not the terrible threatnings of God against sin declare him to be highly offended at it? when he says, *That he will come in flaming fire, to render vengeance to all them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of his Son, and that they shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Can we think that all the threatnings of God's Word, and all those direful *curses* which are written in his book, shall return empty, without doing any execution? Thou that now flatterest thy self with vain and groundless hopes, that none of these Evils shall come upon thee, when thou comest to stand before the great Judge of the World, and to behold the killing frowns of his Countenance, and

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to

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to hear those bitter words of eternal displeasure from the Mouth of God himself, *Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels*, thou wilt then believe, that God is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy sins. We shall find in that day, that the threatnings of God's Word, which we now hear so securely, and without terror, had a full signification, or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the Scripture says of the happiness and glory of the next life, is true also of the misery and punishments of the other World, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man, those terrible things, which God hath reserved for the workers of iniquity.*

But above all, the direful sufferings of the Son of God, when sin was but imputed to him, are a demonstration of God's implacable hatred of sin; for that rather than sin should go unpunish'd, God was pleased to subject his own Son to the sufferings due to it; this plainly shews, that he hated sin as much as he loved his own Son.

But

But (2dly) God may conceive a  very great displeasure against sin, and Vol.VII. be highly incensed and provoked by it, and yet suspend the Effects of his displeasure, and defer the punishment of it for a great while; and to imagine otherwise, argues a gross mistake of the Nature of God, arising from our not considering the Attributes and Perfections of God in conjunction and consistency with one another. When we consider one Attribute of God singly, and separate it from the rest, and frame such wide and large apprehensions of it, as to exclude his other Perfections, we have a false Notion of God; and the reason of this mistake is, because among Men, an eminent degree of any one Excellency, doth commonly shut out others; because in our narrow and finite Nature, many Perfections cannot stand together; but 'tis quite otherwise in the Divine Nature. In Infinite Perfection, all Perfections do meet and consist together, one Perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of God, we are to take great heed, that we do not raise any one Attribute or Perfection of God upon the ruine of the rest. So



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So that it is a false imagination of God, when we so attribute *Justice* or *Anger* to him, as to exclude his *Patience* and *long-suffering*; for God is not impatient in his Anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not presently put him out of patience, so that he cannot contain his Wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himself upon Sinners. In this sense God says of himself, *Isa. 27. 4. Fury is not in me.* There is nothing of a rash and ungoverned Passion in the wise and just God. Every sin indeed kindles his anger, and provokes his displeasure against us, and by our repeated and continued Offences, we still add Fuel to his Wrath; but it doth not of necessity instantly break forth like a *consuming fire, and a devouring flame.* The holy and righteous Nature of God makes him necessarily offended and displeased with the sins of Men; but as to the manifestation of his Wrath, and the effects of his Anger, his Wisdom and Goodness do regulate and determine the proper time and circumstances of Punishment.

3. From

3. From the Patience of God and the delay of punishment, Men are apt to conclude, that God is not so severe in his Nature as he is commonly represented. 'Tis true he hath declared his displeasure against sin, and threaten'd it with dreadful punishments, which he may do, in great wisdom, to keep the World in awe and order ; but great things are likewise spoken of his Mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exercise of his Mercy ; so that notwithstanding all the threatnings which are denounced against sin, it is to be hoped, that when *Sentence* comes to be *past*, and *Judgment* to be *executed*, God will *remember mercy in the midst of judgment*, and that *mercy will triumph over judgment* ; and that as now his Patience stays his hand, and turns away his wrath, so at the last, the milder Attributes of his Goodness and Mercy will interpose and moderate the rigor and severity of his Justice ; and of this, his great Patience and long-suffering towards Sinners for the present, seems to be some kind of pledge and earnest ; he that is so *slow to anger*, and so loth to execute punishment,

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**W**orshipment, may probably be prevail'd  
 Vol. VII. upon by his own Pity and Goodness  
 to remit it at the last; and this is the  
 more credible, because it is granted on  
 all hands, that no person is obliged  
 to execute his threatnings, as he is  
 to make good his promises; he that  
 promiseth passeth a right to another,  
 but he that threatneth keeps the right  
 and power of doing what he pleaseth  
 in his own hands.

I shall speak a little more fully to  
 this, because it is almost incredible,  
 how much Men bear up themselves  
 upon vain and groundless hopes of the  
 boundless Mercy of God, and *blest*  
*themselves in their hearts, saying, 'They*  
*shall have peace, tho' they walk in the ima-*  
*gination of their hearts, to add drunken-*  
*ness to thirst,* that is, tho' they still per-  
 sist in their Vices, and add one degree  
 of sin to another.

Now for answer to this;

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare  
 threatning does not necessarily infer  
 the certainty of the event, and that  
 the thing threatned shall infallibly  
 come to pass; no person is obliged  
 to perform his threatnings, as he is his  
 promises; the threatnings of God de-  
 clare

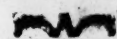
clare what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly expect if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatnings of God, and will effectually hinder the execution of them, *Jer. 18. 7, 8, 9, 10.*

*At what instant I speak (says God) concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.* Now if when God hath promised to do good to a People, sin will hinder the blessing promised, and bring down Judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatned.

But as to the case of final impenitency and unbelief, God, that he might strengthen his threatnings, hath added a sign of *immutability* to them, having confirmed them with an Oath,

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 **Vol. VII.** *I have sworn (saith the Lord) that they shall not enter into my rest ; which tho' it was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, the Apostle to the Hebrews applies it to final unbelief and impenitency under the Gospel, of which the infidelity of the Israelites was a Type and Figure. Now tho' God may remit of his threatnings ; yet his Oath is a plain declaration that he will not ; because it signifies the firm and immutable determination of his Will, and thereby puts an end to all doubts and controversies concerning the fulfilling of his threatnings.*

(2.) It is certainly much the wisest and safest way, to believe the threatnings of God in the strictness and rigour of them, unless there be some tacite condition evidently implied in them ; because if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwise, the consequence of our mistake is fatal and dreadful. 'Tis true indeed, that God by his threatnings did intend to keep sinners in awe, and to deter them from sin ; but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of these threatnings, such a revelation would quite take

take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and design of them; for threatnings signifie very little, but upon this supposition, that in all probability they will be executed; and if this be true, it is the greatest madness and folly in the World to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As for those large declarations which the Scripture makes of the boundless Mercy of God to Sinners, we are to limit them, as the Scripture hath done, to the time and season of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and salvation, and when this life is ended, the opportunities of Grace and Mercy are past, and *the day of recompence and vengeance* will begin. Now God tries us, and offers Mercy to us; but if we obstinately refuse it, Judgment will take hold of us.

And then we must limit the Mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are repentance for sins past, and sincere obedience for the future: but if Men continue obstinate and impenitent, and encourage themselves in sin from the Mercy and Patience of God, this is not a case that

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that admits of Mercy ; but, on the contrary, his Justice will triumph in the ruin and destruction of those, who instead of embracing the offers of his Mercy, do despise and abuse them. *He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes ; when their fear comes as desolation, and their destruction as a whirl-wind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon them ; then they may call upon him, but he will not answer ; they may seek him early, but they shall not find him. If we despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance, he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpose ; with the froward he will shew himself froward, and will be in a more especial manner severe towards those, who take encouragement from his Mercy, to disbelieve and despise his threatnings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can express any thing, Deut. 29. 19, 20. And if it come to pass, that when he heareth the words of this curse, he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, tho' I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst : The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the*

*draw from God's long-suffering.*

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*the Lord, and his jealousie shall smoke a-*  
*gainst that man, and all the curses that are*  
*written in this book, shall lie upon him,*  
*and the Lord shall blot out his name from*  
*under heaven.*

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What ever right and power God hath reserved to himself about the execution of his threatnings, he hath plainly declared, that of all others, those who encourage themselves in a sinful course from the hopes of God's Mercy, notwithstanding his threatnings, shall find no favour and mercy at his hand; whatever he may remit of his threatnings to others, he will certainly not spare those, who believe so largely concerning the Mercy of God, not with a mind to submit to the terms of it, but to presume so much the more upon it.

(4.) God hath not been wanting to shew some remarkable Instances of his severity towards Sinners in this World. As he is pleased sometimes to give good Men some fore-tastes of Heaven, and earnestts of their future happiness; so likewise by some present stroke to let Sinners feel what they are to expect hereafter; some sparks of Hell do now and then fall upon the Consciences of Sinners.

That



Vol. VII. That fear which is sometimes kindled in Men's Consciences in this life, that horrible anguish and those unspeakable terrors which some Sinners have had experience of in this World, may serve to forewarn us of *the wrath which is to come*, and to convince us of the reality of those expressions of the Torments of Hell, by *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*. That miraculous Deluge which swallowed up the old World, that Hell which was rained down from Heaven, in those terrible showers of Fire and Brimstone, to consume *Sodom and Gomorrah*; the Earth opening her mouth upon *Corah* and his seditious company; to let them down, as it were, quick into Hell; these and many other remarkable Judgments of God in several Ages upon particular Persons, and upon Cities and Nations, may satisfy us in some measure of the severity of God against sin, and be as it were Pledges to assure Sinners of the insupportable Misery and Torments of the next Life.

(5.) The Argument is much stronger the other way, that because the punishment of Sinners is delayed. so long,

long, therefore it will be much heavier and severer when it comes ; that the wrath of God is growing all this while, and as we fill up the measure of our sins, he fills the vials of his wrath ; Rom. 2. 5. *And according to thy hard and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thy self wrath, against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* God now keeps in his displeasure ; but all the while we go on in an impenitent course, the wrath of God is continually increasing, and will at last be manifested by the righteous Judgment of God upon Sinners. God now exerciseth and displayeth his milder Attributes, his Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience ; but these will not always hold out, there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the Apostle speaks) God will shew his wrath, and make his power known, after he hath endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. All this long time of God's patience and forbearance his wrath is kindling, and he is whetting his glittering sword, and making sharp his arrows ; and this long preparation doth portend a much more dreadful Execution ;


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Vol. VII. so that we should reason thus from the long-suffering of God ; God bears with us, and spares us at present, and keeps in his anger; therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not spare, but his anger will flame forth, and *his jealousie smook against us.* This is but reasonable to expect, that they who in this World *forsake their own mercies,* the mercy of God in the next should forsake them.

4. Another false conclusion which Men draw from the delay of punishment is, that because it is delayed, therefore it is not so certain ; the Sinner escapes for the present, and tho' he have some misgivings and fearful apprehensions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

'Tis true indeed, we are not so certain of the misery of wicked Men in another World, as if it were present, and we lay groaning under the weight of it ; such a certainty as this, would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and strictly call *Faith* ; for *faith is the evidence of things not seen.* But sure we

we have other Faculties besides Sense  to judge of things by ; we may be Vol.VII.  
sufficiently certain of many things which are neither present nor sensible, of many things past and future, upon good ground and testimony ; we are sure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it ; we are certain that we shall dye, tho' we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their causes, as well as in their present existence ; if the causes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared these things to us, is an abundant ground of assurance to us, tho' they be at a great distance. The certainty of things is not shaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

Besides, the very light of Nature, and the common Reason of Mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-suffering of God and the delay of present punishment. Tho' Men are apt to think, that because Judgment is deferr'd, therefore it is not certain ; yet the very light of Nature hath taught Men to reason otherwise ; that because God is so patient to Sinners in this

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life,



life, therefore there will a time come  
 Vol. VII. when they shall be punisht ; that be-  
 cause this life is a time of tryal and  
 forbearance, therefore there shall be  
 another state after this life, which  
 shall be a season of recompences. And  
 by this argument chiefly it was that  
 the wisest of the Heathen satisfied  
 themselves concerning another state  
 after this life, and answer'd the trou-  
 ble some Objection against the Provi-  
 dence of God, from the unequal ad-  
 ministration of things in this World,  
 so visible in the afflictions and suffer-  
 ings of good Men, and the prosperi-  
 ty of the wicked ; viz. That there  
 would be another state that would  
 adjust all these matters, and set them  
 streight, when good and bad Men  
 should receive the full recompence of  
 their deeds.

The 5th and last false conclusion,  
 which Men draw from the long-suf-  
 fering of God and the delay of Pu-  
 nishment is this, that it is however  
 probably at some distance, and there-  
 fore they may sin yet a while long-  
 er, and all this danger may be pre-  
 vented time enough, by a future re-  
 pentance in our old Age, or at the  
 hour


hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, because they see Men much worse than themselves, great Criminals and Malefactors, upon two or three days warning, to perform this work of repentance very substantially, and to dye with great comfort and assurance of their Salvation. This is the most common delusion of all the rest, and hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more Souls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have *slain their thousands*; but this *its ten thousands*.

For answer to this, be pleased seriously to lay to heart these following considerations, most of which I shall speak but briefly to, because I have, upon other occasions, spoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future Judgment, then it is certain, at how great a distance soever it may be. That which shall be a thousand Years hence will certainly be; and 'tis but very small comfort and encouragement, considering the vast disproportion between Time and Eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty Years shall be past and gone, then must I enter upon eternal

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ternal

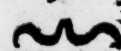
 ternal Misery ; then will those intolerable Torments begin which shall never have an end.

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(2.) But it is not certain that it is at such a distance ; when we *put from us the evil day*, it is many times nearer to us than we are aware, and when we think the Judgment of God is at a great distance, *the Judge may be near even at the door*. Our times are not in our own hands ; but we are perfectly at the disposal of another, who when he pleaseth can put a period to them, and cause our Breath to cease from our Nostrils, and we shall not be ; *There is no man hath power over the Spirit, to retain the Spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death*, saith the wise Man a little before the Text. Thou dreamest perhaps of many Years continuance in this World, and perhaps in the height of this vain imagination, *the decree is sealed, and the commandment come forth* to summon thee out of this World, and thou art just dropping into that misery which thou fanciest to be at such a distance ; whilst thou art vainly promising thyself *the ease of many years*, God may say to thee, *Thou fool, this night shall thy*

*draw from God's long-suffering.*

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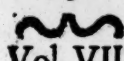
*thy soul be required of thee*, and then   
where are all thy hopes? Vol. VII.

(3.) Supposing the evil Day were at a considerable distance, yet Men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their Salvation upon a future repentance; for what knowest thou, O Man! but thou mayst be surprized by a sudden stroke which may give thee no warning, leave thee no space of repentance? a violent Disease may seize upon thee, which may disorder thy Understanding, and so weaken all thy Faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reasonable operations. At the best, how unfit are we for the most serious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old Age is a very unseasonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakness and infirmity, and our Minds are crooked and bowed down by Vice, as our Bodies are by Age, and as hard to be recovered to their first streightness; much more is it an improper time for this work, when Sicknes and old Age meet together. There are two things in which Men, in other things wise enough, do usually miscarry; in putting off the making of their Wills, and

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their




 their Repentance, till it be too late.  
 Vol. VII. Men had need then be of sound Understanding and perfect Memory, when they set about matters of so great consequence in respect of their temporal and eternal concerns; especially when Men have the happiness of all Eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their understandings about them, and all the advantages of leisure and consideration, to make a sober reflection upon their past lives, and make up their Accounts with God, and to set all things right between him and them; and 'tis well if after all a repentance wilfully deferr'd so long, so short and imperfect, so confused and huddled up, will at last be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miscarriages of a long life.

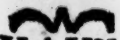
(4.) Suppose thou wert sure to repent before thou leavest the World, and to do this work thoroughly, which no Man can promise to himself that deliberately delays it, yet this can be no reasonable encouragement to go on in an evil course, because we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treasure up so much more for-

sorrow and affliction to our selves against the day of repentance, and consequently sin on, in hopes of being hereafter so much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done ; as if a Man should go on to break the Laws, in hopes of a more severe and exemplary Punishment ; sure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reasonable and considerate Man.

*Lastly,* As to the encouragement which Men take from the sudden repentance of great Criminals and Malefactors, and their dying with so much comfort and assurance ; if this be well considered, there is little comfort to be fetched from such Examples. For,

*1<sup>st</sup>,* Tho' a sincere repentance in such circumstances be possible, yet it is almost impossible for the Party himself concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is sincere. God who knows the hearts of Men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would in the future course of their lives have justified and made good their repentance and good resolutions,

Vol. VII.

 ons, only knows the sincerity of  
Vol. VII. it.


But, 2<sup>dly</sup>, no certain judgment is to be made from the comfort and confidence of the Party concerned; for the business is not what comfort and confidence Men have, but what ground they have for it; and whereas Men are apt piously to suppose, that so extraordinary a comfort and assurance is wrought in them by the Spirit of God, nothing is more uncertain; because we sometimes see those who give no such testimony of their repentance, to dye with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident persuasion of their Salvation, as those that do. But this certainly is not from the Spirit of God; a natural Obstinacy and Courage may carry Men a great way; and false and mistaken Principles may fill Men for the present with as much comfort and confidence, as well grounded hopes. In the Church of *Rome*, great numbers of those who have led very wicked lives, after a formal Confession and Absolution, and some good words of encouragement from the Priest, dye as full of peace and comfort,

fort, to all appearance, as the best of Men. Vol. VII.

Indeed it is very natural to Men, who find themselves in a desperate condition, to be strangely elevated and raised, upon any hopes given of escaping so great a danger as they apprehend themselves to be in ; especially if these hopes be given them by a grave Man, of whose Piety and Judgment they have a venerable opinion. When Men have the Sentence of death in themselves, as all wicked livers must have, they are naturally apt to be overjoy'd at the unexpected news of a Pardon.

To speak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which some have, upon a sudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes, because I cannot discern any sufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehension of their condition, next almost to despair of it, would much better become them ; because their case is really so very doubtful in it self. There is great reason for the repentance of such persons,



 sons, and it becomes them well ; but  
Vol.VII.I see very little reason for their great  
comfort and confidence; nor does it  
become their circumstances and con-  
dition. Let them exercise as deep a  
repentance as is possible, and *bring*  
*forth all the fruits meet for it* that are  
possible in so short a time; let them  
humble themselves before God, and  
pray incessantly to him day and night  
for mercy; make all the reparation  
they can for the injuries they have  
done, by confession and acknowledg-  
ment, and by making satisfaction to  
the parties injured, if it be in their  
power, by giving Alms to the Poor,  
by warning others, and endeavouring  
to reclaim them to a better mind and  
course of life ; and for the rest hum-  
bly commit themselves to the mercy  
of God in Jesus Christ; let them imi-  
tate, as near as they can, the behavi-  
our of the penitent Thief, the only  
Example the Scripture hath left us  
of a late repentance that proved ef-  
fectual, who gave the greatest testi-  
mony that could be of a penitent for-  
row for his sins, and of his Faith in  
the Saviour of the World, by a gene-  
rous and couragious owning of him in  
the

*draw from God's long-suffering.*

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the midst of his disgrace and suffering, when even his own Disciples had denyed and forsaken him ; but we do not find in him any signs of extraordinary comfort, much less of confidence ; but he humbly commended himself to the mercy and goodness of his Saviour, saying, *Lord remember me, when thou comest into thy Kingdom.*

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# SERMON IX.

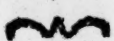
The Long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. VIII. 11.

*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

**I** Have considered how apt Men are to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, and whence this comes to pass; where I considered the several false conclusions which Sinners draw from the delay of Punishment, as if there were no God, or Providence, or difference of good and evil; or else, as is more commonly pretended, that Sin is not so great an Evil, and that God is not



 Vol. VII. not so highly offended at it, or that God is not so severe as he is represented, that the punishment of sin is not so certain, or however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented by a future repentance; all which I have spoken fully to, and endeavoured to shew the fallacy and unreasonableness of them. I shall now proceed to the

*Third* and last thing I propounded, which was to answer an Objection to which this Discourse may seem liable; and that is this. If the long-suffering of God be the occasion of Men's hardness and impenitency, then why is God so patient to Sinners, when they are so prone to abuse his Goodness and Patience? And how is it goodness in God to forbear Sinners so long, when this forbearance of his is so apt to minister to them an occasion of their further mischief and greater ruine? It should seem according to this, that it would be much greater Mercy to the greatest part of Sinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but instantly upon the first occasion and provocation, to cut them off, and so to put a stop to their wick-

wickedness, and to hinder them from making themselves more miserable, by increasing their guilt, and *treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath.* Vol. VII.

This is the Objection, and because it seems to be of some weight, I shall endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to it in these following particulars. And

I. I ask the Sinner if he will stand to this? Art thou serious, and wouldest thou in good earnest have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee or turn thee into Hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? Consider of it again. Dost thou think it desirable, that God should deal thus with thee, and let fly his Judgments upon thee so soon as ever thou hast sinned? If not, why do Men trifle, and make an Objection against the long-suffering of God, which they would be very loth should be made good upon them?

II. It is likewise to be considered, that the long-suffering of God toward Sinners is not a total forbearance; it is usually so mixt with Afflictions and

R                      Judg-

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Judgments of one kind or other, upon our selves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to *sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon us*; lest that Judgment which we saw inflicted upon others come home to us. And is not this great goodness, to warn us when he might destroy us, to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our case past remedy?

All this time of God's Patience, he threatens Sinners, to awaken them out of their security; he punisheth them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity; he makes Examples of some in a more severe and remarkable manner, that others may *hear, and fear*, and be afraid to commit the like sins, lest the like punishment overtake them; he whips some Offenders before our Eyes, to shew us what sin deserves, and what we also may justly expect, if we do the same things; and will nothing be a warning to us but our own sufferings?

Nay, God doth usually send some Judgment or other upon every Sinner in this life; he lets him feel the Rod, that he may know that it is *an evil*  
and

*tho' Sinners prone to abuse it.*


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*and bitter thing to sin against him.* He ex-  
erciseth Men with many afflictions, and  
crosses, and disappointments, which  
their own consciences tell them are  
the just recompences of their deeds ;  
and by these lighter strokes, he gives  
us a merciful warning to avoid his hea-  
vier blows ; when Mercy alone will  
not work upon us and win us, but be-  
ing *fed to the full, we grow wanton* and  
foolish, he administers Physick to us,  
by affliction and by adversity endea-  
vours to bring us to consideration and  
a sober mind ; and many have been  
cured this way, and the Judgments  
of God have done them that good,  
which his Mercies and Blessings could  
not ; for God would save us any way,  
by his Mercy or by his Judgment,  
by Sicknes or by Health, by Plenty or  
by Want, by what we desire or by  
what we dread ; so desirous is he of  
our repentance and happiness, that  
he leaves no method unattempted  
that may probably do us good ; he  
strikes upon every Passion in the  
Heart of Man ; he works upon our  
Love by his Goodness, upon our  
Hopes by his Promises, and upon  
our Fears, first by his Threatnings,

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and



 and if they be not effectual, then by  
 Vol. VII. his Judgments; he tries every Affection and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himself; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruine us, and render our case desperate and past hope?

And if any Sinner be free from outward Afflictions and Sufferings, yet sin never fails to carry its own Punishment along with it; there is a secret Sting and Worm, a divine Nemesis and Revenge that is bred in the Bowels of every Sin, and makes it a heavy Punishment to it self; the Conscience of a Sinner doth frequently torment him, and his Guilt haunts and dogs him where-ever he goes; for when ever a Man commits a known and willful sin, he drinks down Poison, which tho' it may work slowly, yet it will give him many a Gripe, and if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.

So that the long-suffering of God is wisely ordered, and there is such a mixture of Judgment in it, as is sufficient to awaken Sinners, and much more apt to deter them from sin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.


III. No-

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God, than to harden Men by his long-suffering. This the Scripture most expressly declares, 2 Pet. 3. 9. *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* He hath a very gracious and merciful design in his Patience towards Sinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us so, and that we may cease to do evil. The event of God's long-suffering may, by our own fault and abuse of it, prove our ruin; but the design and intention of it, is our repentance. *He winks at the sins of men (saith the Son of Syrach) that they may repent.* He passeth them by, and does not take speedy Vengeance upon Sinners for them, that they may have time to repent of them, and to *make their peace with him, while they are yet in the way.*

Nay, his long-suffering doth not only give space for Repentance, but is a great argument and encouragement to it. That he is so loth to surprize Sinners, that he gives them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, to consider

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what

 what they have done, and to retract  
 Vol. VII. it by repentance, is a sufficient intimation that he hath no mind to ruin us, that *he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.* And should not this goodness of his make us sorry that we have offended him? Doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance? What other interpretation can we make of his Patience, what other use in reason should we make of it, but to repent and return, that we may be saved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-suffering of God, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to Men in any evil course; the proper and natural tendency of *God's goodness is to lead men to repentance*, and by repentance to bring them to happiness; *Rom. 2. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* This St. Peter, with relation to these very words of St. Paul, interprets, *leading to salvation*; 2 Pet. 3. 15. *And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, as our beloved brother Paul also*

*tho' Sinners prone to abuse it.*

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*also hath written unto you.* Now where Vol. VII.  
did St. Paul write so, unless in this  
Text ; *Not knowing that the goodness of  
God leads to repentance ?* 'Tis not only  
great ignorance, and a very gross mis-  
take, to think that it is the design  
and intention of God's Patience and  
long-suffering to encourage Men in  
sin ; but likewise to think, that in the  
nature of the thing, goodness can have  
any tendency to make Men evil ; *not  
knowing that the goodness of God leads to  
repentance.*

V. That through the long-suffer-  
ing of God Sinners are hardened in  
their evil ways, is wholly to be ascri-  
bed to their abuse of God's goodness ;  
'tis neither the End and Intention,  
nor the proper and natural Effect of  
the thing, but the accidental Event of  
it, through our own fault. And is this  
any real Objection against the long-  
suffering of God ? May not God be pa-  
tient, tho' Sinners be impenitent ? May  
not he be good, tho' we be so foolish  
as to make an ill use of his goodness ?  
Because Men are apt to abuse the Mer-  
cies and Favours of God, is it there-  
fore a fault in him to bestow them  
upon us ? Is it not enough for us to

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abuse



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abuse them, but will we challenge God also of unkindness in giving them? May not God use wise and fitting means for our recovery, because we are so foolish as not to make a wise use of them? And must he be charged with our ruin, because he seeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to our selves, but will we be unthankful to God also? When God hath laid out *the riches of his goodness and patience* upon Sinners, will they challenge him as accessory to their ruin? As if a foolish Heir that hath prodigally wasted the fair Estate that was left him, should be so far from blaming himself, as to charge his Father with undoing him. Are these the best returns which the infinite Mercy and Patience of God hath deserved from us? *Do we thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise.*

God's Patience would save Sinners, but they ruin themselves by their abuse of it; let the blame then lie where it is due, and let God have the glory of his Goodness, tho' Men refuse the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And

VI. And Lastly, But because this Objection pincheth hardest in one point; viz. That God certainly fore-sees that a great many will abuse his long-suffering, to the increasing of their Guilt, and the aggravating of their Condemnation; and how is his long-suffering any Mercy and Goodness to those, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be so much the more miserable, for having had so much Patience extended to them? Therefore for a full answer, I desire these six things may be considered.


1. That God designs this life for the tryal of our Obedience, that according as we behave our selves he might reward or punish us in another World.

2. That there could be no tryal of our Obedience, nor any capacity of Rewards and Punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice.

3. That God, by virtue of the infinite Perfection of his Knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future Events, even those which are most.

most contingent, such as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary Agents. This I know hath been deny'd, but without reason; since it is not only contrary to the common apprehensions of Mankind from the very light of Nature, that God should not fore-know future Events, but to clear and express Scripture; and that in such Instances, for the sake of which they deny God's fore-knowledge in general of the future actions of free and voluntary Agents, I mean, that the Scripture expressly declares God's determinate fore-knowledge of the most wicked actions; as the Crucifying of Christ, who is said, *according to the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, to have been by wicked hands crucified and slain.*

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the sight and knowledge of things present hath upon them to make them to be present. I may see or know that the Sun is risen, without being the cause of its rising; and no more is bare knowledge of future Events the cause that they are, when

when they are. And if any Man ask  how God can certainly fore-know Vol. VII. things, which depend upon free and arbitrary causes, unless he do some way decree and determine them? I answer, that this is not a fair and reasonable demand, to ask of Men, who have but finite Understandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite Knowledge hath of knowing and of fore-seeing the actions of free Creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is of the two much more credible to reason, that infinite Knowledge should certainly fore-know things, which our Understandings cannot imagine how they should be fore-known, than that God should any ways be the Author of Sin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of Men. The first only argues the imperfection of our Understandings; but the other lays the greatest blemish and imperfection that can be upon the Divine Nature.

So that this difficult Controversie about the fore-knowledge of God is brought to this point, Whether a Man had better believe, that infinite Knowledge



**M**  
Vol. VII.

ledge may be able to fore-know things in a way which our finite understanding cannot comprehend: or to ascribe something to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow that he is the author of Sin. The first is only a modest and just acknowledgment of our own ignorance; the last is the utmost and greatest absurdity that a Man can be brought to; and to say that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of God, unless we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreasonable, than if an ignorant Man should deny a difficult proposition in *Euclid* or *Archimedes* to be demonstrated, because he knows not how to demonstrate it.

5. And consequently fore-knowledge and liberty may very well consist; and notwithstanding God's fore-knowledge of what Men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

*Lastly*, That God doth not deal with Men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad use of their liberty, but according to the nature and reason of things; and therefore if he be long-suffering toward Sinners,  
and

and do not cut them off upon the first Provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of repentance, and use all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his Grace to excite good resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their wilful Obstinacy and Impenitency is as culpable, and God's Goodness and Patience as much to be acknowledged, as if God did not foresee the abuse of it; because his fore-sight and knowledge of what they would do, laid no necessity upon them to do what they did.

  
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If a Prince had the priviledge of fore-knowledge as God hath, and did certainly foresee, that a great many of his Subjects would certainly incur the penalty of his Laws, and that others would abuse his goodness and clemency to them; yet if he would govern them like free and reasonable Creatures, he ought to make the same wise Laws to restrain their exorbitancy, and to use the same clemency in all cases that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foresee what they would

would

Vol. VII. would do, nor how they would abuse his clemency ; for it is nevertheless fit to make wise and reasonable Laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, tho' it were certainly foreseen, that they that are governed would act very foolishly and unreasonably in the use of their liberty. It is great goodness in God to give Men the means and opportunity of being saved, tho' they abuse this goodness to their farther ruin ; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obstinacy in Men, which he certainly fore-sees will end in their ruin ; and may with great seriousness and sincerity wish they would do otherwise, and were as *wise to do good, as they are wilful to do evil.* And thus he is represented in Scripture, as regretting the mischief which Men wilfully bring upon themselves ; *O that they were wise, O that they would understand, and consider their latter end !*

And this is sufficient to vindicate the goodness of God in his Patience and long-suffering to Sinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befalls them for their wilful contempt and abuse of it. I

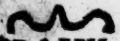
I shall draw some Inferences from this whole Discourse upon this Argument. Vol. VII

I. This shews the unreasonableness and perverse disingenuity of Men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in sin from the long-suffering of God, which above all things in the World should melt and soften them. Thou hast sinned and art liable to the Justice of God, Sentence is gone forth, but God repites the execution of it; and hath granted thee a Reprieve, and time and opportunity to sue out thy Pardon. Now what use ought we in reason to make of this Patience of God towards us? We ought certainly *to break off our sins by a speedy repentance, lest iniquity be our ruin;* immediately to sue out our Pardon, and *to make our peace with God, while we are yet in the way,* and to resolve, never any more willingly to offend that God who is so gracious and merciful, so long-suffering and full of compassion. But what use do Men commonly make of it? They take occasion to confirm and strengthen themselves in their wickedness, and

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to




 Vol. VII. to reason themselves into vain and groundless hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, because punishment doth not come, therefore to hasten it, and to draw it down upon ourselves? Because it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Because there is yet a possibility of escaping it, therefore to take a certain course to make it unavoidable? Because there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our case desperate and past remedy? See how unreasonably Men bring ruin upon themselves; so that well might the Psalmist ask that Question, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?*

But their folly and unreasonableness is not so great, but their perverseness and disingenuity is greater. To sin, because God is long-suffering, *is to be evil, because he is good*, and to provoke him, because he spares us; it is *to strive with God*, and to contend with his goodness, as if we were resolved to try the utmost length of his Patience; and because God is loth to punish, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is so contrary to his Inclination.

II. This

II. This may serve to convince Men of the great evil and danger of thus abusing the long-suffering of God. It is a provocation of the highest nature, because it is to trample upon his dearest Attributes, those which he most delights and glories in, his Goodness and Mercy; for the long-suffering of God is his Goodness to the guilty, and his Mercy to those who deserve to be miserable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more speedy, and more intolerable, than the abuse of God's Goodness and Patience. After God had born long with that rebellious People, the Children of *Israel*, and notwithstanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had spared them *ten times*, at last he sets his Seal to their ruin, *Heb. 3. 8, 9. Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your Fathers proved me, and saw my works forty years.* This was a high provocation indeed, to harden their hearts under the Patience and long-suffering of God, after forty Years tryal and experience of it; *v. 10. Wherefore I was grieved with*  
S. that

 *that generation, and said, They are a*  
 Vol. VII. *people that do err in their hearts, for*  
*they have not known my ways. And what*  
*was the issue of all this? Upon this*  
*God takes up a fixt resolution to bear*  
*no longer with them, but to cut them*  
*off from the Blessings he had promi-*  
*sed to bestow upon them; He sware in*  
*his wrath, that they should not enter into*  
*his rest. To whom sware he, that they should*  
*not enter into his rest, but to them that*  
*believed not? or as the word may be*  
*rendred, to them that were disobedient?*  
*that is, to them who went on in their*  
*rebellion against him, after he had*  
*suffered their manners forty years.*

And as the abuse of God's Patience renders our destruction more certain, so more speedy and more intollerable. We think that because God suffers long, he will suffer always; and because punishment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the sooner for this: So our Lord tells us, *Luke 12. When the servant said, His Lord delayed his coming, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the*

the hypocrites. None so like to be surprised by the Judgment of God, as those who trespass so boldly upon his Patience. Vol. VII.

III. To perswade us to make a right use of the Patience and long-suffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and design of God therein.

1. It is the design of God's long-suffering, to give us a space of repentance. Were it not that God had this design and reasonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a sinner for one moment, but would execute Judgment upon him so soon as ever he had offended: This our Saviour declares to us by the Parable of the Fig-tree, *Luke 13. 6.* Were it not that God expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would cut us down, and not suffer us to cumber the ground; after he had waited three years, seeking fruit and finding none, he spares it one year more, to see if it would bear fruit.

2. The long-suffering of God is a great encouragement to repentance. We see by his Patience that he is not ready to take advantage against us; that he spares us when we offend, is a



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very good sign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural Light would reason, and so the King of *Nineveh*, a Heathen, reasons, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* But we are fully assured of this by the gracious declarations of the Gospel, and the way of pardon and forgiveness which is therein established *through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ*, who was made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Therefore the long-suffering of God should be a powerful argument to us to break off our sins by repentance: For this is the End of God's Patience; He is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live.

God every where expresseth a vehement desire and earnest expectation of our repentance and conversion; Jer. 4. 14. *O Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.* And Chap. 13. 27. *Woe unto thee Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?* He who is so patient as to the punishment of our sins, is almost impatient of our repentance

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 pentance for them; *Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?* And can we stand out against his earnest desire of our happiness, whom we have so often and so long provoked to make us miserable?

Let us then return into our selves, and think seriously what our case and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the Patience of God hath suffered our manners, and waited for our repentance, and how inevitable and intollerable the misery of those must be who live and dye in the contempt and abuse of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked lives, and say, *What have we done?* How careless have we been of our own happiness, and what pains have we taken to undo our selves?

Let us speedily set about this Work, because we do not know how long the Patience of God may last, and the opportunities of our Salvation be continued to us. This day of God's Grace and Patience will have an end, therefore, as the Prophet exhorts, *Isa. 55. 6. Seek the Lord, while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* Now God graciously invites Sinners to

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come

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come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them *depart from him*, when they shall cry, *Lord; Lord, open unto us*, and *the door of mercy shall be shut* against them.

All the while thou delayest this necessary work, thou venturest thy immortal Soul, and puttest thy eternal Salvation upon a desperate hazard, and should God snatch thee suddenly away in an impenitent state, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcilable, but Death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the best thy Life is uncertain, and Death will infallibly put a period to this day of God's Grace and Patience.

Repentance is a work so necessary, that methinks no Man should lose so much time as to deliberate, whether he should set about it or not; *de necessariis nulla est deliberatio*; no man deliberates about what he must do, or be undone if he do it not. 'Tis a work of so great consequence and concernment,

ment, and the delay of it so infinitely dangerous, that one would think no wise Man could entertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and stupidity can there be, than for Men to venture their immortal Souls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlasting consequence?

This day of God's Patience is the great opportunity of our Salvation, and if we let it slip, it is never to be recovered : If we mis-improve this time of our life, we shall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our state of tryal ends with this life, after that God will prove us no more ; then we shall wish, *O that I had known in that my day, the things which belonged to my peace, but now they are hid from mine eyes ; therefore to day, whilst it is called to day, harden not your hearts, make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day, for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord break forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed ; exercise repentance in the time of health, and defer not till death to be justified.*

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# SERMON X.

The Power of God.

PSAL. LXII. 11.

*God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard  
this, that power belongeth unto God.*

**I**N treating of the Attributes of God, I have consider'd those which relate to the Divine *Understanding*, to which I referr'd his *Knowledge* and *Wisdom* ; those also which relate to the Divine *Will* ; viz. God's Justice, Truth, Holiness, and Goodness ; I come now to consider his *Power of acting*, which is his *Omnipotency* ; this I shall speak to from these words.

In the beginning of this Psalm, *David* declares that God was the great Object of his trust and confidence,  
and

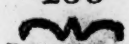
Vol.VII. and that all his hopes and expectation of safety and deliverance were from him, v. 1, 2. And this makes him challenge his Enemies for all their mischievous qualities and devices against him, as vain attempts, v. 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himself to continue his trust and confidence in God, from whom was all his expectation, and who was able to save and deliver him; v. 5, 6, 7. And from his Example and Experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to trust in God, v. 8. and that from two Arguments.

1. Because all other Objects of our trust and confidence are vain and insufficient, and will fail those that rely upon them. If we will rely upon any thing in this World, it must either be *Persons* or *Things*; but we cannot safely repose our trust in either of these. Not in *Persons*: They may be reduced to one of these two Heads, either high or low: Those that are of a mean condition, it would be in vain to trust them; they that cannot secure themselves from meanness, cannot secure others from mischief, *Men of low degree are vanity*: But great ones of the World, they seem


seem to promise something of assistance and security to us ; but if we depend upon them, they will frustrate us, *Men of high degree are a lie.* As for the *Things* of the World ; that which Men usually place their confidence in, is Riches ; these are either got by unlawful, or lawful means ; if they be ill gotten, by Oppression or Robbery, they will be so far from securing us from Evil, that they will bring it upon us ; if they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature, that we have little reason to place our hopes in them ; *If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them,* that is, your hope ; for *heart* in Scripture signifies any of the Affections.

2. Because God is the proper Object of our trust and confidence. We may safely rely upon any one, in whom these two things concur, a Power to help us, and Goodness to incline him so to do. Now *David* tells us, that both these are eminently in God, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him ; *Power, v. 11. and Goodness, v. 12.*



  
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I shall speak to that which *David* makes the first ground of our confidence, *the Power of God* ; *Power belongs to God* : For which he brings the testimony of God himself, *once hath God spoken, yea twice have I heard this*. Some Interpreters trouble themselves about the meaning of this Expression, as if it did refer to some particular Revelation of God ; and then again they are troubled how to reconcile God's speaking this but once, with *David's* hearing it twice ; but I do not love to spy Mysteries in these Expressions which are capable of a plain Sense ; for I understand no more by it but this, that God hath several times revealed this ; he frequently declared himself by this Attribute, *once, yea twice*, that is, he hath *spoken it often*, and *David* had *heard it often*. This is answerable to that Phrase of the Latins, *Semel atque iterum* ; and it is usual in all Writers, to use a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among Poets, *Felices ter & amplius*, Hor. And so in the Poetical Writers of Scripture, *Job* 5. 19. *He hath delivered thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee* ; that is, in several

veral and various troubles. *Eccles. 11.*   
 2. Give a portion to seven and also to eight, that is, distribute thy Charity to many; and which is nearest to this, *Job 40. 5. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea twice, but I will proceed no further*; that is, I have had several Discourses with my Friends; and 33. 14. *God speaketh once, yea twice, in a dream, in a vision of the night*; that is, God reveals himself in several ways and manners to Men; so here, *God hath spoken once, yea twice*, that is, God hath often declared this. And if I would be so curious to refer to a particular declaration of God, I should think, that it related either to the Preface to the Law, *I am the Lord thy God*, that is, the great and powerful God, *that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*; or rather to the declaration which God made of himself to *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, by the name of the Almighty God, *Gen. 17. 1.* Concerning which revelation of God, it is said expressly, *Ex. 6. 3. I appeared unto Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, by the Name of God Almighty, but by my Name Jehovah, was I not known to them.*

But

  
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But that which I design to speak to, is the Proposition it self, that *Power belongs to God*; that is, that the excellency of Power, Power in its highest degree and perfection; *all Power belongs to God*, that is, that *Omnipotence* is a Property or Perfection of the Divine Nature.

In the handling of this, I shall shew,

*First*, What we are to understand by the *Omnipotence* of God.

*Secondly*, That this Perfection belongs to God.

*First*, What we are to understand by the *Omnipotence* of God. And this I shall consider,

I. As to the *Principle*. And,

II. As to the *Exercise* of it.

I. As to the Principle, it is an ability to do all things; the doing of which speaks Power and Perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the Thing, or an imperfection in the Doer; an ability to do all things which are consistent with it self, and with the divine Nature and Perfection; by which we must mean

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an executive Power, the Effect where-  
of is without himself; for what he is  
said to do within himself, the acts of  
his Understanding and Will, as we  
conceive his Will to be distinct from  
his Power, are not to be referr'd to  
his *Omnipotence*. To have a right  
conception of *Omnipotence*, we must  
imagine the most perfect active Prin-  
ciple that we can, and 'tis still some-  
thing more perfect than that, or any  
thing we can imagine. To help our  
conception,

1. Let us imagine a Principle from  
which all other power is derived, and  
upon which it depends, and to which  
it is perfectly subject and subordi-  
nate.

2. A perfect active Principle, which  
can do, not only what any finite Be-  
ing or Creature can do, but what  
all Beings joyned together can do;  
nay more and greater things than  
they all can do.

3. A perfect active Principle, to  
which nothing can make any conside-  
rable, much less effectual resistance,  
which can check and countermand at  
pleasure, and carry down before it,  
and annihilate all other Powers that

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we can imagine besides this ; because we cannot imagine any other Power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active Principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things at once and in an instant, and that with ease. We can but do one thing at once, and the greater and more considerable it is, the more time it will ask us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done ; but God, to whose knowledge all things are present at once, and together ; and the acts of whose Will are as quick and perfect as of his Understanding, hath a Power answerable to the Perfection of both, and therefore 'tis as easie to him to do all things, as one thing, at once, as successively, and in time ; for this is the priviledge of an Infinite Spirit, that it does not only act without Hands and material Engines or Instruments, as every Spirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, because he is every where and fills all places ; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a *willing* that such a thing

thing be done, and *ipso facto* every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into Being, or vanish out of Being, as if they did break forth into Being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, at the beck of his will. And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the Scripture seems to express to us, when it represents God as *making things by his word*, *upholding all things by the word of his power*; as if he did but *speak the word*, and say, *Let such a thing be*, and it was so; as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an *express act* of the Divine Will, which is all we can understand by God's *speaking*, by his *word*, and *voice*, and *saying*, *Let things be*; but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working, whereby God is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a word can be spoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant; so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour;

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for

for what is it can object any difficulty Vol. VI to him? At the first Creation of things there was nothing to resist him; and since the Creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and consequently all whose power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is subject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite Power of God; so that we may imagine, the Divine Power would pass through all the resistance that all created Power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more ease than a Bullet passeth through the thin Air, or a Man would pass through a Net of Cobweb.

5. The most perfect active Principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose Perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the Perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the *Omnipotence* of



of God, as to the *Principle*, which hath no bounds and limits. And, Vol. VII.

II. As to the *Exercise* of it, it is only limited by the Divine Will and Wisdom. The Divine Will determines it to its exercise, the Divine Wisdom directs and regulates the exercise of it; that is, God exerciseth his Power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such Effects, and in order to such Ends and Purposes, as seem best to his Wisdom. Hence He is said to *act all things according to his good pleasure, and according to the counsel of his will*; that is, freely and wisely.

As to the *Extent* of this Power, I said it was an ability to do all things that are consistent with it self, and with the Nature and Perfection of God.

*First*, That are consistent with it self, that is, with a Power to do all things. It is a contradiction to imagine, that *Omnipotence* can do that, which if it could be done, would render all Power insignificant. Upon this account, the Divine Power is not said to extend to the working of any thing which implies a contradiction, and



Vol. VII. the terms whereof speak a repugnancy to one another, and mutually destroy one another, and the doing whereof is contrary to the nature of the thing which is supposed to be done, that is, is nonsense, and cannot be imagined to be. For Example, That a thing should be, and not be at the same time. For a Power to make a thing to be, so as it should not be while it is, signifies nothing; because such a Being as is not, is nothing; and to make such a Being, would be to do nothing, and consequently such a Power would signify nothing. So likewise we cannot say, that the Divine Power can cause that the same thing should be made and not be made, that that which hath been, should not have been; for the Power which makes a thing so as that it was not made, and causeth a thing to have been, so as that it hath not been, does nothing; and consequently is no Power. Nor can we say, that the Divine Power can effect that any thing should be made by it self, that is, be the cause of its own Being; for that would be to cause that a thing should be before it is, that is, be,

be, when it is not, which signifies nothing. We cannot say that the Divine Power can effect, that twice two should not make four; for that would be to cause that things should not be what they are, if they be at all, which is to cause that things should be and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot say, that the Divine Power can make a sound to be seen, and colour to be heard; for that would be to make colour and sound all one, that is, things that differ, to be the same while they differ, which is to make colour and sound not to be colour and sound while they are so, which is to do nothing, and consequently argues no Power.

We cannot say the Divine Power can make that which is intrinsically and essentially good, to be evil; and on the contrary: Or that which is necessarily true to be false; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinsically and essentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always good to be sometimes evil, that is, to be evil whilst it is good, that is to make good and evil all one; which

is to bring two things together, which so soon as they do exist, destroy one another, which is to no purpose, because it is to do just nothing; and there is the same reason of true and false.

We cannot say, that the Power of God can cause that the same thing should be hot and cold, dead and alive at the same time; because these destroy one another, and if they were both, neither of them would be, and so the effect we attribute to this Power would be nothing.

We cannot say, that the Divine Power can effect, that the same impression should give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward at the same time; that the same Body should be in two contrary postures, in motion and at rest, and in several places, which are the *contradictions of Transubstantiation*; for, for the same Body to be at the same time in two several places, is to be limited and circumscribed by each of these, that is, to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other, so that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor any other besides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this,  
nor



nor any other besides that ; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where else ; so that a Power to make a Body to be in two places at once, is a Power to make it to be no where, that is, not to be at all, which is no Power ; and there's the same reason of the same Body's being in contrary motion, or in motion and at rest, or in two contrary postures at the same time.

So that by all these Instances it appears, that a Power to do any thing which implies a contradiction, and is repugnant to the nature of things, signifies nothing, and the supposed Effect of it is only to bring terms together, which if they could be brought together, so soon as they meet, will mutually take away and destroy one another, which would be vain and to no purpose.

I have the more explicitly laid open these contradictions, with relation to the gross Doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, in which all, or most of the contradictions which I have mentioned are involved. I know they stily deny, that these contradictions follow

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from

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from that Doctrine, and use pitiful shifts to avoid them; but being not able to satisfy themselves that way, if the worst should come to the worst, they can grant these contradictions, but then they fly to *the Power of God*, which can do things which we call contradictions; or else they say, there are as many contradictions in the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, which all Christians believe. And thus they reproach *Christianity*, to defend *Poper*y; and if they cannot persuade Men to be *Papists*, do what they can to make them *Atheists*, or at least, to hinder them from being *Christians*: but there is not so much malice in this Objection, but there is as little strength. Is it any contradiction, that the same thing should be *three* and *one* in several respects? which is all that the Scripture teacheth concerning the *Trinity*: but if Men will undertake to explain this more particularly than God thought fit to do, and do it in such a manner, as that they cannot free themselves from contradiction, let them look to it, the Christian Religion is not at all concerned in this, further than to censure such Mens boldness and curiosity.

But

But against this exemption of things Vol. VII.  
that imply a contradiction from the  
compass and extent of the Divine  
Power, there are *two* Objections  
which are more considerable, and de-  
serve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant God's fore-knowledge  
of future Events, which seem to us  
to be impossible to be foreknown;  
now why may we not as well grant,  
that God can do things which seem to  
us impossible to be done by any Pow-  
er, as foreknow things which it is  
impossible for any Understanding to  
know? For why should we pretend  
to know the utmost of what infinite  
Power can do, any more than the ut-  
most of what infinite Understanding  
can know?

*Ans.* I know no reason but that the  
Argument should be granted, if there  
were an equal necessity of granting  
the possibility of those things, which  
seem to us impossible to be done,  
that there is of granting the possibili-  
ty of fore-knowing future contingen-  
cies, tho' they seem to us impossible  
to be known. We must grant the  
possibility of fore-knowing future  
contingencies, because the Scripture,  
which

Vol.VII. which we believe to be a Divine Revelation, expressly tells us, that God doth foreknow them, and gives us Instances of it in several Prophecies and Predictions. Now if any Man can shew me as express Texts, which say, that God can make a Body to be in two places at once, I would believe it, tho' I do not see how it is possible; because it is reasonable I should believe, that infinite Power can do many things, the possibility of which my finite Understanding cannot reach. Now whereas the Papists say, the Scripture hath said that from which this necessarily follows, *viz. This is my Body*; this is not enough, unless they could either prove, that it is necessary to understand all Texts of Scripture in a rigorous and strict propriety of the Letter, without admitting any trope or figure in the words; which they do not pretend: or else shew a clear reason, why this should be understood so, more than a thousand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be further argued; If we grant in one case, that those things which seem to be contradictions to us  
may



may be possible, why not in all cases? Unless we had some certain way of distinguishing between seeming contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all contradictions possible, then there is no reason to exempt these from the extent of the Divine Power; but we may safely say, that the Divine Power can make a thing to be and not to be at the same time. To this I answer,

1. I do not grant, that any thing that seems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be possible, unless I have higher assurance and greater reason to believe it to be possible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction; for Example, Suppose it were clearly revealed in Scripture, that two Bodies may be in the same place at the same time (which is not, nor any thing like it) then having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher assurance and greater reason to believe it is possible, than that it is a contradiction; and consequently I have reason to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the same



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same thing may be, and not be at the same time : but tho' in case of Divine Revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which seems to me to be a contradiction ; yet I am not, without great necessity and clear evidence, to offer violence to reason, and affront the faculty of Understanding which God hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which seems to me to be a contradiction ; which the Papists do in the business of *Transubstantiation*, without any evidence of Revelation, and consequently without necessity.

2. But if *this* were revealed in Scripture, that the same thing may be and not be at the same time, I could have no reason to believe that, because I could have no assurance, if that were true, that the Scriptures were a Divine Revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were ; for if it were true, that the same thing may be and not be, then a Divine Revelation may be no Divine Revelation, and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the same time not to believe it, and so all things would fall into uncertainty, and the foundation of

of all assurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of Faith and Practice, Vol. VII would be taken away.

The II. Objection is from the power of Creation, which is generally acknowledged to be a making of something out of nothing; now say the Objectors, this seems as palpable a Contradiction as any thing else.

*Ans.* To us indeed, who converse with material things, and never saw any thing made, but out of pre-existent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing should be created, that is, produced out of nothing: but every thing that is strange is not a contradiction. It is strange to us, and hard to conceive, that there should be such a thing as a Spirit, who never saw, nor can see any thing but matter; and yet we grant there are Spirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing should be made, but out of matter; and yet Spirit, if it were made of any thing pre-existent, cannot be made of matter: but if we will attend to those common dictates of Reason, which every Man, whether he will or no, must assent to, we may easi-

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easily understand Creation to be possible, and free from contradiction. For the clearing of this, I will proceed by these steps.

1. The true Notion of Creation, is the bringing of something into Being, which before had no Being at all ; for the Phrase of making something out of nothing, or out of no pre-existent matter, does mislead our Understandings into odd Conceits, as if nothing could be the material cause of something, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one must grant, that something is ; for we see that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one must grant, that something is of it self, whether *matter*, or *that Being* which we call *God*.

4. Every one must grant, that that which was of it self was always ; for nothing can begin to be of it self.

5. It is much more easie to conceive how a thing that once was not, might sometime be brought into Being by another, than how a thing should be always of it self ; for that which once was not, is supposed to have something before it, *by which* it might



might be made, though not out of *which* it was made; but that which was always, neither had, nor could have any thing *by which*, or out of *which* it could be made. And why cannot a thing come into a Being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it, out of which it should be?

Secondly, I exempt those things from the Extent of Omnipotence, which imply Imperfection, which are contrary to the Nature and Perfection of God, both natural and moral imperfections; for these also destroy Power, because they are not arguments of Power, but of Impotence. Natural Imperfections; as to dye, to be sick, to be in want, to eat, to sleep, to forget, *&c.* Moral Imperfections, those which contradict the holiness of God, as sin and vice, or to compel any to sin; which contradict his Goodness, as to be cruel; which contradict his Truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promise, to deny himself; *Tit. 1. 2. 2 Tim. 2. 13. Jam. 1. 13.* He is said to be ἀντιθετος γενῶν. Contrary to the  
con-



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constancy and immutability of his Nature, as to change his decree, to repent; Contrary to Justice and Equity, as for ever to spare and to pardon obstinate sinners, eternally to punish innocent and good Men; for these are Moral Imperfections, and contradict the Holiness, and Truth, and Goodness, and Justice, and Immutability of the Divine Nature; and that distinction between God's *absolute* and *ordinate* Power, that is, that God hath an *absolute* Power of doing some things, which yet upon *supposition* of his decree, or promise, or goodness, or justice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unless Men mean by it only this, that some things which argue an imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is most true; but both these are absolutely and equally impossible to God. I proceed to the

*Second Thing* I proposed, That this Perfection belongs to God; and this I shall shew,

I. From the dictates of Natural Light.

II. From the Scripture, or Divine Revelation.

I. From

I. From the dictates of Natural Light. This was one of the most usual Titles which the Heathens gave to their Supreme Deity, *Optimus Maximus*; next to his Goodness they placed his Greatness, which does chiefly appear in his Power; and they did not only attribute a great Power to him, but an *Omnipotence*. *Nihil est quod Deus efficere non potest*, saith Tully *de Div.* Now their Natural Reason did convince them, that this Perfection did belong to God by these three Arguments.

I. From those two great Instances and Expressions of his Power, *Creation* and *Providence*; for the Heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the World, and the Preservation and Government of it, to be the effects of Power, determined by Goodness, and regulated by Wisdom. Hence they gave those Titles to God of *Opifex rerum*, and *ReCTOR mundi*. I say generally, I except *Aristotle*, who supposed the World not to have been made, but to have been from Eternity; and *Epicurus* with his followers, who ascribed the regular and orderly Frame of Nature to a  
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happy casualty and fortunate course of Atoms : but generally the wiser did look upon the vast Frame of Nature, this stately Fabrick of the World, and the upholding and preserving of it, as an argument of a divine and invisible Power. And so the Apostle tells us, *Rom. 1. 20.* that by the Light of Nature, *the invisible things of God were clearly seen by the things that were made, even his eternal power and godhead.*

2. Because all other Perfections without this would be insignificant and ineffectual, or else could not be at all. Without this Goodness would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonstration of it self; Knowledge would be an idle speculation; and Wisdom to contrive things, without Power to effect them, would be an useless thing. There would be no such thing as Justice, if the Divine Nature were without a Power to reward and punish; no such thing as Faithfulness, if he had not a power to perform what he promises; no Providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power, to take upon him to govern and in-

intermeddle in the Affairs of the World. Vol. VII.

3. Without this there could be no Religion. Take away the Power of God, and there can be no foundation of Faith and Trust, no reason for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent Being that could do nothing. The sanction of God's Laws would be taken away. To give authority to Laws, there must not only be a right to command, but power to back those commands; the grand security and last resort of all Government and Authority is Power; James 4. 12. *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy.* None can be a Law-giver, but he that hath this power, to reward and punish, to make Men happy or miserable, *to save, or to destroy.* Men would not pray to God, nor make any address to him, if they did not believe he were able to supply their wants, and relieve them in their straits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales consensissent alloquendi surda numina & inefficaces deos,* Sen. There would be no encouragement

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for



Vol. VII. for Men to serve God, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them, and bring them to happiness, and to defend them against all the Enemies of their welfare, so that it should not be in the power of the most malicious Spirits to hinder them of their happiness.

II. From Scripture or Divine Revelation. In producing Texts to this purpose, I will proceed by these steps.

1. Take notice of those which in general ascribe Power, and Might, and Strength to God. *Psal. 24. 8. The Lord strong and mighty. So girt with power; the mighty God; thine is the greatness and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.* Of the same nature are those places which call upon all Creatures to ascribe this to God; *Give unto the Lord ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.*

2. Those which ascribe this to God in an eminent degree. *Job 9. 4. He is mighty in strength; excellent in power; who is like unto him? The Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

3. Those

3. Those Texts which ascribe such a Power as transcends any human or created Power. Such as those which express all the power which Men have to be derived from God ; *John 19. 11. Thou couldest have no power at all, except it were given thee from above.* And those which advance the Power of God above the Power of Men ; *Luke 18. 27. The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God ; He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.* Eph. 3. 20. 2 Chron. 20. 6. Job 9. 4. *According to his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself,* Phil. 3. 21. Dan. 4. 35. Those which declare all things to be equally easie to him, and nothing difficult ; *There is nothing too hard for thee,* Jer. 32. 17. 2 Chron. 14. 11. 1 Sam. 14. 6.

4. Those which ascribe all Power to him, by the Titles of *Almighty, Al-sufficient,* Gen. 17. 1. Rev. 4. 8, 11. 15. 3. 16. 7. 19. 26. Job. 42. 2. *Thou canst do all things.* Matth. 19. 6. Mark. 10. 27. Luke 1. 37.

I have dispatch'd what I propos'd upon this Argument, give me leave to apply all in the following particulars.

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Use.

  
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Use. *First*, The consideration of God's Omnipotence may cause terror to wicked Men. All this Power which I have described, or rather, which is so great that I cannot describe it, is engaged against Sinners; *His power and his wrath is against all that forsake him*, Ezra 8. 22. And who knows what those words signifie, *Psal. 99. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? as is thy fear, so is thy wrath.* There is no Passion in the Heart of Man more infinite than our Fear, it troubles us with jealousy and suspicion of the utmost that may happen; but when we have extended our Fears to the utmost, the power of God's wrath reacheth further. Whenever we sin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite Power to do its worst to us; *Job 15. 25. speaking of the wicked Man, He stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty.* Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miserable for ever? *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?* Because he doth nothing against thee for the present, thinkest thou he can do nothing?

*Nah.*

*Nah. 1. 3. He is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not acquit the wicked.*

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*There is a day a coming, when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.*

Secondly, The consideration of God's Omnipotence should check the Pride and vain Confidence of Men. What have we to be proud of? *What have we that we have not received? Where then is cause of boasting? Who may glory in his sight?* Those that have the greatest Power should remember whence it is derived, and render back the Glory of it to the Fountain of it. *Psal. 29. 1. Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.* So likewise it should take Men off from relying upon their own strength, which at the best is but *an arm of flesh*, as the Scripture calls it, for the weakness of it. Do we not see, that many times *the battel is not to the strong?* That things are not done *by might and by power, but by the spirit of the Lord.* When he appears against the most potent, *their hearts melt within them, and there is no more spirit left in them,* as 'tis said of the mighty Inhabitants of Canaan, *Josh. 5. 1.*

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Thirdly,



Vol. VII. *Thirdly, We should make this Omnipotence of God the Object of our trust and confidence. This is the most proper use we can make of this Doctrine, as David does in this Psalm; and this was used for a form of blessing the People in the Name of God; Psal. 136. 3. The Lord that made heaven and earth, bless thee. And David, when he magnifies God's deliverance of his People from the multitude of their Enemies, resolves it into this, Our help standeth in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Thus did the great Pattern and Example of Faith encourage and support his confidence in God in a very difficult trial; he staggered not at it, because he believed God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that be not as tho' they were; therefore against hope he believed in hope, &c. Rom. 4. 17. &c. This gives life to all our Devotion, to be perswaded, that God is able to do for us exceedingly above what we can ask or think, and that his is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory.*

I shall only caution two things as to our reliance on the Power of God.

I. La-

I. Labour to be such Persons to whom God hath promised that he will engage and imploy his Omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from *the Almighty*, we must *walk before him and be perfect*, as he said to *Abraham*. Good Men have a peculiar interest in God's Power; hence he is called *the strength of Israel*, and *the mighty one of Israel*. If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his Power, and exert his Arm for us; but if we disobey, we must expect he will manifest his Power against us, *Ez. 8. 22*. When we do well, we may *commit the keeping of our souls to him*, *1 Pet. 4. 19*.

II. Our expectations from the Omnipotence of God must be with submission to his Pleasure, and Goodness, and Wisdom; we must not expect that God will manifest his Power, when we think there is occasion for it, but when it seems best to him; he will so imploy his Omnipotence, as to manifest his Goodness and Wisdom.

And with these two Cautions, we may rely upon him in all our Wants, both Spiritual and Temporal; for his  
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**Vol. VII.** Divine Power can give us all things that pertain to life and godliness; 2 Pet. 1. 3. We may trust him at all times, for the Omnipotent God neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, the Almighty fainteth not, neither is he weary; trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.

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# SERMON XL

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature.

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JOHN. IV. 24.

*God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth.*

**T**Hese are the words of our Saviour to the Woman of Samaria, who was speaking to him of the difference between the Samaritans and the Jews concerning Religion; v. 20. *Our Fathers worshipped in this mountain, but ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.* Christ tells her, *The time was coming, when the worshippers of God should neither be confined to that mountain,*  
*nor*



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*nor to Jerusalem ; but men should worship the Father in spirit and in truth,* when this carnal, and ceremonial, and typical Worship of God should be exalted into a more spiritual, a more real, and true, and substantial Religion, which should not be confined to one Temple, but should be universally diffused through the World. Now such a Worship as this, is most agreeable to the Nature of God ; for *he is a spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* In the words we have,

*First, A Proposition laid down, God is a spirit.*

*Secondly, A Corollary or Inference deduced from it, they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth.* I shall speak of the Proposition, as that which concerns my present Design ; and afterward speak something to the Corollary or Inference deduced from it, together with some other Inferences drawn from this truth, by way of Application.

*First,*

*First, That God is a spirit.* This expression is singular, and not to be parallell'd again in the Scripture; indeed we have often mention made in Scripture of *the spirit of God*, and *the spirit of the Lord*, which signifies a Divine Power and Energy; and of *the holy Spirit*, signifying the third Person in the *Trinity*; God is call'd *the God of the Spirits of all flesh*; Numb. 16. 22. 27. 16. much in the same Sense, as he is call'd *the Father of Spirits*, Heb. 1. 9. that is, the Creator of the Souls of Men; but we no where meet with this expression, or any other equivalent to it, that *God is a spirit*, but only in this place; nor had it been used here, but to prove that the best Worship of God, that which is most proper to him, is *spiritual*; so that the thing which our Saviour here intends, is not to prove the Spiritual Nature of God, but that his Worship ought to be spiritual; nor indeed is there any necessity that it should have been any where said in Scripture, that *God is a spirit*, it being the natural Notion of a God; no more than it is necessary that

  
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that it should be told us, that God is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like; or that the Scripture should prove to us the Being of a God. All these are manifest by the Light of Nature, and if the Scripture mention them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is usually in order to some further purpose.

For we are to know, that the Scripture supposeth us to be Men, and to partake of the common Notions of Human Nature, and therefore doth not teach us Philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those things which are born with us, but supposeth the knowledge of these, and makes use of these common Principles and Notions which are in us concerning God, and the immortality of our Souls, and the Life to come, to excite us to our Duty, and quicken our Endeavours after Happiness. For I do not find that the Doctrine of the immortality of the Soul, is any where expressly delivered in Scripture, but taken for granted; in like manner that the Scripture doth not solicitously instruct

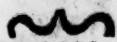
struct us in the natural Notions which we have of God, but supposeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not so much in order to knowledge as to practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this expression, which doth set forth to us the Nature of God, is but once used in Scripture, and that brought in upon occasion, and for another purpose; because it is a thing naturally known.

Plato says, that God is *ἄσώματος*, without Body. In like manner Tully,

*Nec enim deus ipse qui intelligitur a nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quaedam soluta & libera, segregata ab omni concretionem mortali; we cannot conceive of God, but as of a pure Mind, intirely free from all mortal composition or mixture.*

And Plutarch after him, *ὅς ἐστιν ὁ θεός, χωρὶς ὅλων, τέλει τὸ ἀμυγῆς πάσης ὕλης, μὴδὲν παθεῖν συμπεπλεγμένον*, God is a Mind, an abstract being, pure from all matter, and disintangled from whatever is passible or capable of suffering. So that Natural Light informing us that God is a Spirit, there was no need why the Scripture should inculcate this; it is an excellent medium or argu-



 argument to prove that the Worship  
 Vol.VII. of God should chiefly be spiritual ;  
 and altho it was not necessary that it  
 should have been mention'd for it self,  
 that is, to inform us of a thing which  
 we could not otherwise know, yet  
 the Wisdom of God, by the express  
 mention of this, seems to have pro-  
 vided against an Error which some  
 weaker and grosser Spirits might be  
 subject to. You know God is pleased,  
 by way of condescension and accom-  
 modation of himself to our capacity,  
 to represent himself to us in Scripture  
 by human Imperfections, and gives  
 such descriptions of himself, as if he  
 had a Body, and bodily Members ;  
 now to prevent any error or mistake  
 that might be occasion'd hereby, it  
 seems very becoming the Wisdom of  
 God, somewhere in Scripture expressly  
 to declare the spiritual Nature of God,  
 that none through weakness or wil-  
 fulness might entertain gross appre-  
 hensions of him. In speaking to this  
 Proposition, I shall,

I. Explain what is meant by a  
*Spirit.*

II. En-

II. Endeavour to prove to you, that *God is a spirit*.

III. Answer an Objection or two.

IV. Draw some Inferences or Corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the Notion of a *Spirit*. I shall not trouble you with the strict Philosophical Notion of it, as that it is such a substance as is penetrable; that is, may be in the same place with a Body, and neither keep out the Body nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is really separated and torn from one another, as the parts of a Body: but I will give you a negative description of it. A *Spirit* is not *Matter*, it doth not fall under any of our Senses, it is that which we cannot see nor touch; it is not a Body, not Flesh, and Blood, and Bones; for so we find *Spirit* in Scripture opposed to *Flesh* and *Body*; Isa. 31. 3. *Their horses are flesh, and not spirit*. So Luke 24.

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where

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when Christ appeared to his Disciples after his Resurrection, they were terrified, and *supposed it had been a spirit*, v. 39. But he said, *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I my self; handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* The most usual description of a Spirit is by these Negatives, it is not a Body, hath not Flesh and Bones, doth not consist of Matter, or of any thing that falls under our Senses, that we can see or touch.

II. For the proof of this Proposition, that *God is a spirit*. This is not to be proved by way of *demonstration*, for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cause of him; but by way of *conviction*, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most natural Notion that we have of God, is, that he is a Being every way perfect, and from this Notion we must argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our Reasonings concerning God by this; so that when any thing is said of God, the best way

way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to enquire whether it be a Perfection or not; if it be, it belongs to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any Man ask, why I say God is so, or so, *a Spirit*, or *Good*, or *Just*; the best reason that can be given, is, because these are Perfections, and the contrary to these are Imperfections. So that if I shew that it would be an Imperfection for God to be imagined to be a *Body*, or *Matter*, I prove that he is *a Spirit*, because it is an imperfection, that is, an absurdity to imagine him any thing else. To imagine God to be *a Body*, or *Matter*, doth evidently contradict four great Perfections of God.

1. His Infiniteness, or the immensity of his Being. Grant me but these two things, that there is something in the World besides God, some other matter, as the Heavens, the Air, the Earth, and all those things which we see; and grant me that two Bodies cannot be in the same place at once, and then it will evidently follow,

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that



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that where-ever these are, God is shut out; and consequently God should not be infinite, nor in all places; and so much as there is of another matter in the World besides God, so many breaches there would be in the Divine Nature, so many *Hiatus*.

2. The Knowledge and Wisdom of God. It cannot be imagined how mere Matter can understand, how it can distinctly comprehend such variety of Objects, and at one view take in past, present, and to come. Tully speaking of Spirits, saith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest; their original cannot be found upon Earth; for, saith he, there is no material or bodily thing, Quod vim memoria, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod & prae terita teneat, & futura provideat, & complecti possit praesentia; quae sola divina sunt; which hath the power of Memory, of Understanding, of Thought; which can retain things past, foresee things future, and comprehend things present; all which Powers are purely Divine.*

3. Free-

3. Freedom and Liberty. For the Laws of matter are necessary, nor can we imagine any *ἀνέξιστον*, any arbitrary Principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we see in Lucretius, For if (saith he) all things move by certain and necessary Laws, and there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto each other, so that if you move this, that must necessarily be moved; whence, saith he, is Liberty? *Unde est hec inquam fatis avulsa voluntas; Whence is this Principle of Will, whose motions are not under any law of necessity.*

4. Goodness. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely; so that take away Understanding and Liberty, and you take away Goodness; now take away from God Infiniteness, and Knowledge, and Liberty, and Goodness, and you divest him of his Glory; you take away his most essential Perfections. So that these great absurdities following from the supposing of God to be mere *Matter* or *Body*,

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we are to conceive of him as another kind of substance, that is, a Spirit. So that I wonder that the Author of the *Leviathan*, who doth more than once expressly affirm, that there can be nothing in the World, but what is material and corporeal, did not see that the necessary consequence of this Position, is to banish God out of the World. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt he did see it, and was content with the consequence, and willing the World should entertain it; for it is so evident, that by supposing the Divine Essence to consist of Matter, the immensity of the Divine Nature is taken away; and it is also so utterly unimaginable how mere Matter should understand, and be endowed with liberty, and consequently with goodness, that I cannot but vehemently suspect the Man who denies God to be a *Spirit*, either to have a gross and faulty understanding, or a very ill will against God, and an evil design to root out of the Minds of Men the belief of a God. I come in the

III Place,



III. Place, to consider the Objecti-  
ons. Vol. VII

1 *Obj.* Why then is God represented to us so often in Scripture by the Parts and Members of Mens Bodies ?

*Ans.* I shall only say at present, that all these descriptions and representations of God, are plainly made to comply with our weakness, by way of condescention and accomodation to our capacities.

2 *Obj.* How is it said that *Man was made after the the Image of God*, If God be a *Spirit*, of which there can be no likeness nor resemblance.

*Ans.* Man is not said to be *made after the image of God*, in respect of the outward Shape and Features of his Body ; but in respect of the Qualities of his Mind, as Holiness and Righteousness ; or of his Faculties, as Understanding and Will ; or which the Text seems most to favour, in respect of his Dominion and Sovereignty over the Creatures ; for in the two former respects the Angels are made after the Image of God. Now this seems to be spoken peculiar-



**Vol. VII.** ly of Men; Gen. 1. 26. Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air, &c.

IV. I come now to draw some Inferences or Corollaries from hence, and they shall be partly *speculative*, partly *practical*.

*First, Speculative Inferences.*

1. That God is invisible. The proper Object of sight is Colour, and that ariseth from the various dispositions of the parts of Matter which cause several reflections of Light; now a Spirit hath no Parts nor Matter, and therefore is invisible; 1 Tim. 1. 17. *Unto the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.* Heb. 11. 27. *He endured, as seeing him who is invisible; as seeing him by an Eye of Faith, who is invisible by an Eye of Sense.* 1 Tim. 6. 16. *Whom no Man hath seen, nor can see.*

When

When *Moses* and the Elders of *Israel* are said to have *seen God*, and *Jacob* to have *seen him face to face*, *Exod.* 2. 9. *Gen.* 32. 30. it is meant of an Angel covered with divine Glory and Majesty, as we shall see if we compare these with other Texts. When *Moses* is said to have *spoken to him face to face*, that is familiarly; and so *Micaiah*, *1 Kings* 22. 19. is said to have *seen God upon his throne*, and *all Israel scattered up and down*; this was in a Vision. And it is promised, that in Heaven we shall *see God*, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him and full enjoyment; as to *see good days*, is to enjoy them. Those Texts where it is said, *No man can see God and live*, *Exod.* 33. 20. and *John* 1. 18. *No man hath seen God at any time*, do not intimate that God is visible, tho' we cannot see him; but *seeing* is metaphorically used for *knowing*, and the meaning is, that in this Life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of God. A clear discovery of God to our Understanding would let in joys into our Souls, and create desires in

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Vol. VII. us too great for frail Mortality to bear,

2. That he is *the living God*. Spirit and Life are often put together in Scripture.

3. That God is immortal. This the Scripture attributes to him, 1 Tim. i. 17. *To the King immortal, invisible.* 1 Tim. 6. 16. *Who only hath immortality.* This also flows from God's Spirituality; a Spiritual Nature hath no principles of Corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish, or decay, or dye. Now this doth so eminently agree to God, either because he is purely spiritual, and immaterial, as possibly no Creature is; or else because he is not only immortal in his own Nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, because he hath an original and independent Immortality, and therefore the Apostle doth attribute it to him in such a singular and peculiar manner; *Who only hath Immortality.*

Secondly,

*Secondly, Practical Inferences.*

1. We are not to conceive of God as having a Body, or any corporeal Shape or Members. This was the gross conceit of the *Anthropomorphites* of old, and of some *Socinians* of late, which they ground upon the gross and literal Interpretation of many figurative Speeches in Scripture concerning God, as where it speaks of his Face, and Hand, and Arm, &c. But we are very unthankful to God, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our Capacities, if we abuse this condescension to the blemish and reproach of the Divine Nature. If God be pleased to stoop to our weakness, we must not therefore level him to our Infirmities.

2. If God be a *Spirit*, we are not to worship God by any Image or sensible representation. Because *God is a Spirit*, we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent him by *the likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above*,  
that



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that is, of any Birds; *or in the earth beneath*, that is, of any Beast; *or in the waters under the earth*, that is, of any Fish; as it is in the *second Commandment*. For, as the Prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken God to; *I/a. 40: 18. To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him?* We debase his Spiritual and Incorruptible Nature, when we compare him to corruptible Creatures; *Rom. 1. 22, 23. Speaking of the Heathen Idolatry, Who professing themselves wise, became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to fourfooted Beasts, and creeping things. They became Fools;* this is the folly of Idolatry, to liken a Spirit, which hath no bodily shape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that however some are pleased to mince the matter, I cannot see how the Church of Rome, which worships God by or toward some Image or sensible representation, can be excused from *Idolatry*; and the Church of *England* doth not without very just cause challenge the Ro-

God to be worship'd in Spirit and in Truth. 317

Romish Church with it, and make it a ground of separation from her. Vol. VII.

3. If God be a Spirit, then we should worship him in spirit and in truth. This is the Inference of the Text, and therefore I shall speak a little more largely of it ; only I must explain what is meant by *worshiping in spirit and in truth*, and shew you the force of this Consequence, how it follows, that because God is a Spirit, therefore he must be *worship'd in spirit and in truth*.

1<sup>st</sup>. For the explication of it. This word *Spirit* is sometimes apply'd to the Doctrine of the Gospel, and so is opposed to *Letter*, by which Name the Doctrine of Moses is called ; 2 Cor. 3. 6. *Who hath made us able Ministers of the new Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit ; not of the Law which was written in Tables of Stone, but which Christ by his Spirit writes in the Hearts of Believers.* Sometimes to the worship of the Gospel ; and so it is opposed to the *Flesh*, Gal. 3. 3. *Having begun*  
in

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*in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? that is by the works of the ceremonial Law, which is therefore call'd *Flesh*, because the principal ceremony of it, *Circumcision*, was made in the *Flesh*, and because their Sacrifices, a chief part of their Worship, were of the *Flesh* of Beasts; and because the greatest part of their Ordinances, as washing, and the like, related to the *Body*. Hence it is the Apostle calls the worship of the *Jews*, the law of a carnal commandment, Heb. 7. 16. and Heb. 9. 10. Carnal Ordinances, speaking of the Service of the Law, which, saith he, stood in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances. Now in opposition to this carnal and ceremonial Worship, we are to worship God in the Spirit. The Worship of the *Jews* was most a bodily service; but we are to give God a reasonable service, to serve him with the spirit of our minds, as the Apostle speaks; instead of offering the flesh of bulls and goats, we are to consecrate our selves to the service of God; this is a holy and acceptable sacrifice, or reasonable service.*

And

And *in truth*. Either in opposition to the *false* Worship of the Samaritans (as *in spirit* is opposed to the Worship of the Jews) as our Saviour tells the Woman, that *they worship'd they knew not what* ; or (which I rather think) in opposition to the *shadows* of the Law ; and so it is opposed, *John 1. 17. The Law was given by Moses : but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

Not that the external Service of God is here excluded, not that we are to show no outward reverence to him : but that as under the Law, the Service of God was chiefly external and corporeal, so now it should chiefly be inward and spiritual ; the Worship of God under the Gospel should chiefly be spiritual and substantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious Devotion.

2dly. For the force of the Consequence, it doth not lie in this, that just such as God is, such must our Worship of him be ; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worship ;




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ship; our Worship of God must therefore be invisible, eternal, &c. for so is he; and besides the *Will* of God seems rather to be the rule of his Worship, than his *Nature*: but the force of it is this, God is of a spiritual Nature, and this is to be supposed to be his *Will*, that our Worship should be as agreeable to the Object of it, as the nature of the Creature who is to give it will bear; now saith Christ to the Woman, the *Jews* and the *Samaritans* they limit their Worship to a certain place, and it consists chiefly in certain carnal Rites and Ordinances; but, saith he, tho' God have permitted this for a time, because of the carnality and *hardness of their hearts*, yet the time is coming, when a more spiritual, and solid, and substantial Worship of God is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular Places and Rites, not tyed to the Temple, or to such external Ceremonies, but consisting in the devotion of our Spirits, even the inward frame and temper of our Hearts; all outward Circumstances (excepting those of the two

Sa.

Sacraments which are positive) being left by the Gospel to as great a liberty, as natural necessity and decency will permit. Vol. VII.

We must worship God, and therefore it is naturally necessary that we should do it somewhere, in some place; now seeing some body must determine this, it is most convenient that Authority should determine it, according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We must not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the Worship of God; this Authority should restrain; but further than this, I doubt not but the Gospel hath left us free; and to this end, that the less we are tied to external Observances, the more intent we should be upon the spiritual and substantial parts of Religion, the conforming of our selves to the Mind and Will of God, endeavouring to be like God, and to have our Souls and Spirits ingaged in those Duties we perform to him. So that our Saviour's argument is this ;. *God is a Spirit,* that is, *the most excellent Nature and*  
Y Being,

 *Being*, and therefore must be served  
 Vol. VII. with *the best*. We consist of Body  
 and Soul, 'tis true, and we must serve  
 him with our *whole Man*; but princi-  
 pally with our *Souls*, which are the  
 most excellent Part of our selves; the  
 Service of our Mind and Spirit is the  
 best we can perform, and therefore  
 most agreeable to God who is a Spirit,  
 and the best and most perfect *Be-  
 ing*.

So that the Inference is this, that if  
*God be a Spirit*, we must *worship him  
 in spirit and in truth*; our Religion  
 must be real, and inward, and sin-  
 cere, and substantial; we must not  
 think to put off God with external ob-  
 servances, and with bodily reverence  
 and attendance; *this* we must give  
 him, but we must *principally* regard  
 that our Service of him be reasonable,  
 that is, directed by our Understand-  
 ings, and accompanied with our Af-  
 fections. Our Religion must consist  
 principally in a sincere love and af-  
 fection to God, which expresth it  
 self in a real conformity of our lives  
 and actions to his Will; and when  
 we

we make our solemn approaches to him, in the Duties of his Worship and Service, we must perform all acts of outward Worship to God with a pure and sincere Mind; whatever we do in the Service of God, we must *do it heartily as to the Lord*. God is a pure Spirit, present to our Spirits, intimate to our Souls, and conscious to the most secret and retired motions of our Hearts; now because we serve the Searcher of Hearts, we must serve him with our Hearts.

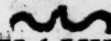
Indeed if we did worship God only to be seen of Men, a pompous and external Worship would be very suitable to such an end; but Religion is not intended to please Men, but God, and therefore it must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external part of Religion is principally regarded, and Men are more careful to worship God with outward pomp and ceremony, than *in spirit and in truth*, Religion degenerates into Superstition, and Men embrace the shadow of Religion, and let go the substance.

Y 2

And



Vol. VII.  And this the Church of *Rome* hath done almost to the utter ruin of Christianity; she hath clogged Religion, and the Worship of God, with so many Rites and Ceremonies, under one Pretence or other, that the *Toke* of *Christ* is become *heavier* than *that* of *Moses*; and they have made the *Gospel* a more *carnal* Commandment than the *Law*; and whatever Christians or Churches are intent upon external Rites and Observances, to the neglect of the weightier Parts of Religion, regarding *meats and drinks*, &c. to the prejudice of *righteousness and peace*, wherein the *kingdom of God* consists, they advance a Religion as contrary to the Nature of God, and as unsuitable to the genius and temper of the Gospel, as can be imagined.

It is an Observation of Sir *Edwin Sands*, that as Children are pleas'd with Toys, so, saith he, it is a pitiful and childish Spirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious Religion. I deny not but that very honest and devout

vout Men may be this way addicted; but the wiser any Man is, the better he understands the Nature of God and of Religion, the further he will be from this temper.

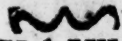
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A Religion that consists in external and little things, doth most easily gain upon and possess the weakest Minds, and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their Spirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent Duties of Christianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity, and if we let out much of it upon small things, there will be too little left for those parts of Religion which are of greatest moment and concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of Religion will insensibly cool and decline.

How should we blush who are *Christians*, that we have not learnt this easie truth from the Gospel, which even the Light of Nature taught the Heathen; *Cultus autem deorum est optimus itemque sanctissimus atque castissimus,*

Y. 3

mus,


 **Vol. VII.** *mus, plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ integrâ & incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur, Tully. The best, the purest, the most chaste, and most devout worship of the Gods, is that which is pay'd them with a pure, sincere, and uncorrupt Mind, and words truly representing the thoughts of the Heart. Compositum jus fasque animi; &c. Serve God with a pure, honest, holy frame of Spirit, bring him a heart that is but generously honest, and he will accept of the plainest Sacrifice.*

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious Worship of the *Jews* was never a thing in it self acceptable to God, or which he did delight in; and tho' God was pleas'd with their obedience to the ceremonial Law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not desire it; but that which our Saviour saith concerning the Law of Divorce, is true likewise of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the *Jews* for the *hardness of their hearts*, and for their proneness to Idolatry. God did not command it so much by way of approbation,

bation, as by way of condescension to their weakness; it was because of *the hardness of their carnal hearts* that God brought them under *the Law of a carnal Commandment*, as the Apostle calls it. See *Psal.* 51. 16, 17. *Jer.* 7. 21. Vol.VII.

The reason why I have insisted so long upon this, is to let you understand, what is the true nature of Christ's Religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which Men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in Religion. The Sacrifices and Rites of the *Jews* were very unagreeable and unsuitable to the Nature of God; *Psal.* 50. 13. *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unsuitable way of service to kill Oxen and Sheep for God; and there's the same reason of all other Rites which either natural necessity or decency doth not require. Can any Man in earnest think, that *God* who is a *Spirit* is pleased with the pompous bravery and pageantry which affects our Senses? So



 little doth God value indifferent  
 Vol. VII. Rites, that even the necessary external Service of God, and outward Reverence, where they are separated from *spirit and truth*, from real holiness and obedience to the indispensable Laws of Christ, are so far from being acceptable to God, that they are abominable ; nay, if they be used for a Cloak of Sin, or in opposition to real Religion, and with a design to undermine it, God accounts such Service in the number of the most heinous Sins.

You who spend the strength and vigour of your Spirits about external things, whose *zeal for or against Ceremonies* is ready to eat you up, you who hate and persecute one another because of these things, and break the necessary and indispensable Commands of Love, as an indifferent and unnecessary Ceremony, *go, and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,* which our Saviour doth so often inculcate, and that *Rom. 14. 17. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink,*

*in Spirit and in truth.*

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*drink, &c. And study the meaning*  
*of this, God is a Spirit, and they that*  
*worship him, must worship him in Spirit*  
*and in truth.*

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Ser-

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# SERMON XII.

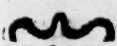
The Immensity of the Divine Nature.

PSAL. CXXXIX. 7, 8, 9, 10.

*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or  
whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art  
there; if I make my bed in hell, be-  
hold, thou art there. If I take the  
wings of the morning, and dwell in the  
uttermost parts of the sea, even there  
shall thy hand lead me, and thy right  
hand shall hold me.*

**T**HAT Attribute of God which  
I last discours'd of is most  
Absolute, and declares his  
Essence most immediately;  
*the spirituality of the Divine Nature.*  
I shall in the next place speak of  
those



 those which relate to the manner of  
 Vol. VII. his Being, *Immensity* and *Eternity*,  
 that is, the *infiniteness* of his Essence,  
 both in respect of *space* and *duration*;  
 that the Divine Nature hath no li-  
 mits of its Being, nor bounds of its du-  
 ration. I shall at the present speak  
 to the *first* of these, his *Immensity*,  
 and that from these words which I  
 here read to you, *Whither shall I go from*  
*thy spirit, &c.* The meaning of which  
 is this, That God is a Spirit, infi-  
 nitely diffusing himself, present in all  
 places, so that wherever I go, God  
 is there; we cannot flee from his  
 presence. *If I ascend into heaven, he*  
*is there; if I go down into the grave,*  
*the place of silence and obscurity,*  
*he is there;* (for that is the meaning  
 of the Expression, *If I make my bed in*  
*hell.*) *If I take the wings of the morn-*  
*ing, and dwell in the uttermost parts of*  
*the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me,*  
*and thy right hand shall hold me;* that  
 is, if my motion should be as swift as  
 that of the light, which when the Sun  
 riseth darts it self in an instant from  
 one part of the World to another,  
 over the Earth and the Sea, the re-  
 moteſt

most parts of the World which are  
unknown to us, yet would God be  
present to me in the motion, and  
all along as I go must I be led and  
upholden by him; so that all these  
Expressions do but signifie to us the  
*Immensity* of God's Essence, that his  
Being is infinitely diffused and pre-  
sent in all Places.

In speaking to this Attribute of God's *Immensity*, I shall *First* explain it to you a little.

*Secondly,* Prove that it doth belong to him.

*Thirdly, Answer an Objection or two that may be made against it.*

*Fourthly, Draw some doctrinal Inferences from it.*

*Fifthly*,. Make some use and improvement of it.

*First*, For the explication of it. By the *Immensity* of God, I mean that his Being hath no bounds or limits, but

  
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but doth every way spread and dif-  
fufe it felf beyond what we can ima-  
gine ; fo that you cannot define the  
prefence of God by any certain place,  
fo as to fay here he is, but not there ;  
nor by any limits, fo as to fay, thus  
far his Being reacheth, and no fur-  
ther ; but he is every where prefent  
after a moft infinite manner, in the  
darkeft corners and moft private re-  
cefles ; the moft fecret Clofet that is  
in the whole World, the Heart of  
Man, darknefs and privacy cannot  
keep him out ; the prefence of ano-  
ther Being, even of a Body, which  
is the groffeft fubftance, doth not ex-  
clude him ; the whole World doth  
not confine him ; but he fills all the  
fpace which we can imagine beyond  
this vifible World, and infinitely more  
than we can imagine.

*Secondly*, For the proof of it. I fhall  
attempt it,

I. From the natural Notions and  
Dictates of our Minds.

II. From


II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

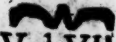
I. From the natural Notions and Dictates of our Minds. We find that the Heathen, by the Light of Nature, did attribute this Perfection to God. Tully tells us, *De Nat. deor.* That Pythagoras thought, *Deum esse animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum & commeantem*, That God is as it were a Soul passing through and inspiring all Nature. And in l. 2. *de leg.* that this was Thales his Opinion which he commends, *Homines existimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia esse plena*, That Men ought to believe, that the Gods see all things, that all things are full of them. So Sen. Epist. 95. *Ubique & omnibus præsto est*; He is every where present and at hand. & de Benef. L. 4. *Quocunque te flexeris, ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus suum ipse implet*; Which way soever thou turnest thy self, thou shalt find him meeting thee, nothing

is



 is without him, he fills his own work.  
Vol. VII. Not much differing from the Expression of the Psalmist here.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation. I shall instance in some remarkable places; 1 Kings 8. 27. *Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.* Job. 11. 7, 8, 9. *Can'st thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* Isa. 66. 1. *Thus saith the Lord, behold, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-stool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?* Jer. 23. 23, 24. *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?* Amos 9. 2, 3. *Tho' they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence: and tho' they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the*  
the

he serpent and he shall bite them. Acts   
 17. 27, 28. Tho he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being, as certain also of your own Poets have said, For we are also his off-spring.

III. From the inconveniences of the contrary. And this is the most proper way of proving any of God's Perfections; for as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cause of his being, his Perfections cannot be proved by way of *demonstration*, but of *conviction*, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most easie Notion that we have of God, is, that he is a Being which hath all Perfection, and is free from all Imperfection; now if I prove that the *Immensity* of God's Essence is a Perfection, or which is the same, that the contrary is an Imperfection, I do sufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to suppose the Divine Essence to be limited, or confined, and his presence to be any where excluded,  
 Z doth

Vol. VII. doth contradict both this necessary Perfection of God, his universal Providence; and this necessary Duty of Creatures, to worship and trust in him; and the voluntary manifestation and appearance of God, in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

1. It contradicts the universal Providence of God. The universal Providence of God supposeth many Perfections, *viz.* infinite Knowledge, and infinite Power, his Omniscience and Omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without Omnipresence. We find that all finite Beings, have a finite Knowledge, and a finite Power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite Understanding and Power can be founded any where else than in an infinite Essence. To have an infinite Knowledge of all things, even those things which are most secret and hidden, to be able to do all things, to steer and govern the Actions of all Creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, seems to all the Reason of Mankind, to require immediate Presence.

2. It


2. It contradicts the necessary Duty of the Creature, which is to worship God, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all Worship of God is rendred vain, or at least uncertain, if God be not present to us to hear our Prayers, to take notice of our Wants, and receive our Acknowledgments; it will much abate our Confidence in God, and our Fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be present to us or not, whether he sees our Actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary Manifestation and Appearance of God in the Incarnation of Christ. He that supposeth God not to be every where present by his Essence, must in all reason confine his Presence to Heaven, and suppose him to be present elsewhere only by his Virtue and Power: but if this were so, how could the Divinity be essentially united to the Humane Nature of Christ, which was here upon Earth?

Z 2

How



Vol. VII.  How is God with us ; How does he pitch his Tabernacle among Men ; if his essential Presence be confin'd to Heaven?

Thirdly, I come to answer Objections against this Doctrine.

There are *two* Objections against this.

1. From Reason.
2. From Scripture.

1. *Obj.* Reason will be ready to suggest, that this is a disparagement to the Divine Nature, to tie his Presence to this vile Dunghil of the Earth, and sordid Sink of Hell. This is a gross Apprehension of God, and a measuring of him by our selves. Indeed if we look upon God as capable of Injury, and Suffering, and Offence from the Contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed there were some strength in this Objection: but he is a blessed and pure Being, *Mens segregata ab omni concretione*

*cretione mortali, A Mind free from all mortal Composition or Mixture. Tully; μηδενὶ παθῆναι συμπεπλεγμένον, disentangled from every thing passible; as Plut. Those things that are nauseous to our Senses, do not affect him: Darkness is uncomfortable to us, but the Darkness and the Light are all one to him. Wickedness may hurt a man, or the son of man; but if we multiply our transgressions, we do nothing to God, as Elibu speaks, Job 35. 6. Nothing can disquiet or discompose his happy and blessed Nature, but he converseth here in this dark and troubled World with less danger of Disturbance, or any impure Contagion, than the Sunbeams.*

2. Obj. Does not the Scripture tell us, that God sits in the Heavens, and dwells on high, that Heaven is his throne, and that it is the City of the great God? Doth not the Lord's Prayer teach us to say, *Our Father which art in heaven?* Is he not said to look down from heaven, and to hear in heaven his dwelling-place?

Z 3

Vol. VII. *place?* Is it not said that *he doth not dwell in temples made with hands?* And does not Solomon, *1 Kings 8. 27.* put it as a strange question, *will God indeed dwell on the earth?* Is he not said to *come down and draw near to us, and to be afar off from us?* Now how does this agree with his *Immensity and Omnipresence?*

For answer to this, I must distinguish the Presence of God. There is, *1st*, his *glorious Presence*, that is, such a Presence of God as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifestation of his Glory, and that is especially and chiefly confined to Heaven, in respect of which it is called his *Seat, and Throne, and the Habitation of his Glory*. Some degree of this was in the Temple, which is the reason of Solomon's Admiration, *will God indeed dwell on Earth?*

*2dly*, There is his *gracious Presence*, which discovers it self by miraculous effects of his Favour, and Goodness, and Assistance, and thereby

by he is said to dwell in the hearts of good Men, and with them that are of an humble and contrite Spirit, Isa. 57. 15. and in respect of this he is said to draw near to us, to look down upon us; and in respect of the absence of this to be far from us.

3dly, There is his *essential Presence*, which is equally and alike in all Places; and this is not excluded by those former Expressions which the Scripture useth to denote to us the *glorious* and *gracious* Presence of God.

*Fourthly*, To make some Inferences. I will mention only such as the Scripture here takes notice of, speaking of God's *Immensity*.

I. *Inf.* That God is a Spirit. This necessarily flows from his *Immensity*; for if the Essence of God be every where diffused, the Divine Nature must be spiritual, otherwise it could not be in the same place were Body and Matter is, but must be shut out of the World. But this I spoke

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more



*more largely to, in my Discourse of God's being a Spirit. This the Psalmist observes here, Where shall I go from thy Spirit? If he were not a Spirit, we might go from him, and hide our selves from his Presence.*

II. *Inf.* That God is Incomprehensible. That which is infinite cannot be measured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this also the *Psalmist* takes notice of, in the Verse before my Text, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain it.*

III. *Inf.* That God is Omniscient. If God be every where, then he knows all things, yea even the hidden things of Darkneſs, the Secrets of our Hearts; nothing can be hid from an infinite Eye; he is present to our Thoughts, intimate to our Hearts and Reins; this the *Psalmist* takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12 Verses.

IV. *Inf*


IV. *Inf.* That God is Omnipotent. *He can do all things.* Distance limits the Power of Creatures, and makes *their hands short*; but God is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this also the *Psalmist* intimates in the Text, *v. 10. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me.*

*Fifthly,* The Use and Improvement I shall make of this, shall be,

1. To awaken our Fear of him.

2. To encourage our Faith and Confidence in him.

1. To awaken our Fear of him. The Consideration of God's Presence should awaken in us a Fear of Reverence. The Presence of an earthly Majesty will awe our Spirits, and compose us to Reverence; yea the Presence of a wise and good Man; how much more should the Presence of the great and glorious, the wise and the holy, and the just God

Vol. VII.  God strike an awe upon our Spirits? Wherever we are God is with us, we always converse with him, and live continually in his Presence; now a Heathen could say, *cum Diis verecundè agendum*, We must behave our selves modestly because we are in the presence of God.

And it should awaken in us a Fear to offend God, and a Fear of the divine displeasure for having offended him. Fear is the most wakeful Passion in the Soul of man, and is the first Principle that is wrought upon in us from the Apprehensions of a Deity, it flows immediately from the principle of Self-preservation which God hath planted in every Man's Nature; we have a natural Dread and Horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our Being or Happiness: now the greatest Danger is from the greatest Power, for where we are clearly over-match'd, we cannot hope to make Opposition nor Resistance with security and success, to rebel with Safety: now  
he

he that apprehends God to be near him, and present to him, believes such a Being to stand by him as is possessor of an infinite and irresistible Power, and will vindicate all Contempt of the Divine Majesty, and Violation of his Laws. If we believe God to be always present with us, *Fear will continually take hold of us*, and we shall say of every place, as Jacob did of Bethel, *surely God is in this place, how dreadful is this place?* When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the just God is at hand to revenge himself, and if we believe *the power of his anger*, we shall say with David, Psa. 76. 7. *Thou even thou art to be feared, and who may stand before thee when thou art angry?* Psa. 119. 120. *My flesh trembleth because of thee, and I am afraid of thy Judgments.*

Sinners consider this, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, and every time you sin, you are within his reach. Let then the consideration of God's Presence deter



**W**  
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deter us from Sin, and quicken us to our Duty. The Eye and Presence of a Superior will lay a great restraint upon Men; the Eye of our Prince, or our Master, or our Father, will make us afraid or asham'd to do any thing that is foolish or unseemly: And will we do that under the Eye of God, which we should blush to do before a grave or wise Person, yea before a Child or a Fool? Did but Men live under this apprehension, that God is present to them, that an holy and all-seeing Eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute God's glorious name, by a trifling use of it in customary swearing and cursing. Whenever you sin, you affront God to his Face; and provoke the omnipotent justice which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the consideration of this should especially deter us from secret Sins. This is the use the *Psalmist* here makes of it. If we believe that  
God

God searcheth us and knows us, that he knows our down-sitting, and our up-rising, and understands our thoughts afar off, that he compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways, that there is not a word in our tongue, but he knows it altogether, that he hath beset us behind and before, that the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day, and the darkness and light are both alike; I say, if we believe this, how should we live in an awful sense of the Majesty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inseparable from us, as we are from our selves, whose Eye is upon us from the beginning of our Lives to the end of our Days? Did Men believe that God is always with them, that his Eye pierceth the Darkness, and sees through all those Clouds with which they hide and muffle themselves, and pries into the most secret Recesses of their Hearts, how would this check and restrain them from devising mischief in their hearts, or in their Bed cham-

ber?

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ber? The holy Presence, and the pure Eye of God would be to us a thousand times more than to have our Father, or our Master, or our Prince, or him whom we most revere, to stand by us. Did but Men *representare sibi Deum, make God present to them*, by living under a continual sense of his Presence, they would, as the Expression of the wise Man is, *be in the fear of the Lord all day. Magna spes peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adfistat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus autoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius facit*; The main hope of Sinners is to remain undiscover'd, let but some body be privy to their designs, and they are utterly disappointed: 'Tis fit for the Mind of a Man to have an awe of some Being, whose Authority may render even its privacy more solemn. This is the Character of wicked Men, Psa. 86. 14. *that they have not God before their Eyes*. One great cause of all the Wickedness, and Violence, and Looseness that is upon the Earth is, they do not believe

lieve that God is near them, and stands by them. Vol. VII.

And as the consideration of God's Presence should deter us from Sin, so it should quicken and animate us to our Duty. It is ordinarily a great Encouragement to Men to acquit themselves handsomely, to have the Eyes of Men upon them, especially of those whose Applause and Approbation they value. God alone is *amplum Theatrum*, he's a greater Theater than the World, and it should be more to us that *he* stands by us, than if the Eyes of all the World were fix'd upon us. *Sen.* adviseth it as an excellent means to promote Virtue, to propound to our selves, and set before our Eyes some eminently virtuous Person, as *Cato* or *Laelius*, *ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo vidente faciamus*: That we may live just as if he were looking upon us, and do all things just as if he beheld us. How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that God looks upon us, and sees us, and really



**M**ally stands by us, than faintly to  
Vol. VII. imagine the Presence of *Lælius* or  
*Cato*?

This should have an Influence upon all the Duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who stands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to our selves. This *Cic.* in *l. 2. de leg.* looks upon as a great principle of Religion, *sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, & qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, quâ mente, quâ pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere: Let Men be thoroughly perswaded of this, that the Gods observe, both the disposition and the actions of every particular Man, what he consents to, what he allows himself in, particularly with what meaning, with what degree of inward Devotion he performs his religious worship; and that they distinguish between the pious and the impious.*

2. To



2. To encourage our Faith and Confidence in him. When we are in Straits, and Difficulties, and Dangers, God is with us; when Trouble is near to us, God is not far from us; where ever we are, how remote soever from Friends and Companions, we cannot be banisht from God's Presence; if we dwell beyond the utmost parts of the Sea, there his hand leads us, and his right hand holds us. Psa. 16. 8. *I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* The consideration of God's Presence is the great stay and support of our Faith, Psa. 46. 1, 2. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the Sea. In the greatest Commotions, and the most imminent and threatening Dangers, this should charm and allay our Fears, that God is a present help.*

A a

This

  
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This was the support of *Moses* his Faith in his Sufferings, as the Apostle tells us, *Heb. 11. 27. he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

To conclude all, when ever we are under any Pressure or Trouble, we should rebuke our own Fears, and challenge our anxious Thoughts, with *David, Psa. 42. 11. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? trust still in God;* believe that God is with thee, and that Omnipotent Goodness stands by thee, who can and will support thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee when it seems best to his Wisdom.

S E R M.

# SERMON XIII.

The Eternity of God.

PSALM XC. 2.

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou had'st formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.*

**T**HE *Immensity*, and *Eternity* of God are those Attributes which relate to his Nature, or manner of Being. Having spoken of the former, I proceed to consider the latter, from these words.

A a 2

The



  
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The Title of this Psalm is *the Prayer of Moles; the man of God.* He begins his Prayer with the acknowledgment of God's Providence to his people from the beginning of the World; *Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place from all generations; in generation and generation; so the Hebrew.* He was well acquainted with the History of the World, and the Providence of God from the beginning of it, and as if he had spoken too little of God, in saying, that his Providence had been exercised in all the Ages of the World, he tells us here in the Text, that he was before the World, and he made it, he was from all Eternity, and should continue to all Eternity the same. *Before the mountains were brought forth; the most firm and durable parts of the World, the most eminent and conspicuous; Or ever thou had'st formed the earth and the world; before any thing was created; from everlasting to everlasting thou art*

*art. God.* In speaking of this At-tribute, I shall,

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*First*, Give you the Explication of it.

*Secondly*, Endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the Divine Nature.

*Thirdly*, Draw some Corollaries from the whole.

*First*, For the Explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: Now there are two limits of duration, *beginning* and *ending*; that which hath always been is without beginning; that which always shall be is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of its being now to cease, tho' there be no such thing in the World: and there are some things which have had a beginning of their Being, but shall have no

A a 3      end,


 end, shall always continue, as the  
 Vol. VII. Angels, and Spirits of Men. The  
 first of these the Schoolmen call  
 Eternity, *à parte ante*, that is *duration without beginning*; the latter  
 Eternity *à parte post*, a *duration without ending*: but *Eternity* absolutely taken comprehends both  
 these, and signifies *an infinite duration which had no beginning, nor shall have any end*; so that when we  
 say God is Eternal, we mean that  
 he always was, and shall be for  
 ever; that he had no beginning  
 of Life, nor shall have any end of  
 Days; but that *he is from everlasting to everlasting*, as it is here  
 in the Text.

'Tis true indeed, that as to God's  
 Eternity, *à parte ante*, as to his  
*having always been*, the Scripture  
 doth not give us any solicitous  
 account of it; it only tells us in  
 general, that God was *before the world was*, and that *he created it*; it doth not descend to gratifie our  
 curiosity, in giving us any account of what God did before  
 he

he made the World, or how he entertained himself from all Eternity. Vol. VII. nity; it doth not give us any distinct account of his *infinite duration*; for that had been impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend; if we should have ascended upward millions of Ages, yet we should never have ascended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the Scripture, which was wrote to instruct us in what was necessary, and not to satisfy our curiosity, tells us this, that God was *from everlasting, before the world was made, and that he laid the foundations of it.*

So that by the *Eternity* of God, you are to understand *the perpetual continuance of his Being, without beginning or ending.*

I shall not trouble you with the inconsistent and unintelligible notions of the Schoolmen; that it is *duratio tota simul*, in which we are not to conceive any succession, but to

A a 4 . ima-



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imagine it an instant. We may as well conceive the *Immensity* of God to be a *point*, as his *Eternity* to be an *instant*; and as according to our manner of conceiving, we must necessarily suppose the *Immensity* of God, to be an infinite *Expansion* of his *Essence*, a presence of it to all places, and imaginable space; so must we suppose the *Eternity* of God to be a perpetual continuance, coexistent to all imaginable succession of *Agès*. Now how that can be together, which must necessarily be imagined to be coexistent to successions, let them that can conceive.


*Secondly*, For the proof of this, I shall attempt it *two* ways.

I. From the Dictates of Natural Light and Reason.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation.

I. From

I. From the Dictates of Natural Reason. This attribute of God is of all other least disputed among the Philosophers; indeed all agree that God is a perfect and happy Being, but wherein that happiness and perfection consists, they differ exceedingly; but all agree that God is *Eternal*, and are agreed what *Eternity* is, viz. *a boundless duration*: and however they did attribute a beginning to their *Heroes* and *Demons*, whence come the Genealogies of their Gods; yet the Supreme God, they look'd upon as without beginning; and it is a good evidence, that this perfection doth clearly belong to God, that *Epicurus*, who had the lowest and meanest conceptions of God, and robbed him of as many Perfections, as his imperfect Reason would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him. *Tully de Nat. Deor. l. 1.* saith to the *Epicureans*, *ubi igitur vestrum beatum & aeternum quibus duobus verbis*


*verbis significatis deum? Where then*  
 Vol. VII. *is your happy and eternal Being, by*  
*which two Epithets you express God?*  
 And Lucretius, who hath undertaken to represent to the World the Doctrine of Epicurus, gives this account of the Divine Nature,  
*Omnis enim per se divum natura*  
*necesse est*  
*Immortali ævo summa cum pace*  
*fruat.*

*'Tis absolutely necessary to the nature*  
*of the Gods, to pass an Eternity*  
*in profound peace and quiet.*

The Poets who had the wildest Notions of God, yet they constantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι: the heathen never mention the name of God without this Attribute. *Dii immortales! Immortal Gods!* was their ordinary exclamation; and they swear constantly by this Attribute, *deos testor immortales*; and to mention no more, Tully saith expressly, *Nos deum nisi sempiternum intelligere qui possumus?* How can we conceive of God, but as of an Eternal Being?

Now

Now the Reason of this is evident, because it would be the greatest imperfection we could attribute to his Being; and the more perfect his Being were otherwise, the greater imperfection would it be for such a Being, to die; so excellent a Nature to cease to be; it would be an infinite abasement to all his other perfections, his Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, that these should all be perishing. Nay, it would hinder several of his perfections, and contradict their very Being; his *self-existence*; had he not *always* been, he had not been *of himself*; his *necessary existence*; for that is not *necessarily*, which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is; and it would much abate the duty of the Creature; we could not have that assurance of his promise, and that security of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his Being, who should be the dispenser of them, were uncertain.

Now



  
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Now these Absurdities and inconveniences following from the denial of this Perfection to God, is sufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the Perfections of God cannot be proved by way of *demonstration*, but only by way of *conviction*, by shewing the Absurdity of the contrary.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpose which speak of the *Eternity* of God *Directly*, and by *Consequence*: By *Consequence*, those words, 2 Peter 3. 8. *One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, which words, however Interpreters have troubled themselves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, that such is the infinite duration of God, that all measures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by this

90 Psalm,

90 Psalm, out of which they are cited, *for a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night;* that is, as the time past, as a few hours slept away, for that is the meaning of *a watch in the night*, that is as nothing; now St. Peter's conversion of the words, *one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, only signifies this, that the longest duration of time is so inconsiderable to God, that it is as the shortest, that is, bears no proportion to the Eternity of God.

But *Directly*, the Scripture frequently mentions this attribute, He's called the *everlasting God*, Gen. 21. 33. *The Eternal God*, Deut. 33. 27. and which is to the same purpose, *he that inhabiteth Eternity*, Isa. 57. 15. And this as it is attributed to him in respect of his *Being*, so in respect of all his *other Perfections*, Psal. 103. 17. *the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting, to everlasting.* Rom. 1. 20. *his*

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20. *his eternal power.* 1 Tim. 1. 17. *the King eternal.* Those Doxologies which the Scripture useth, are but acknowledgments of this Attribute, *Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever.* Neh. 9. 5. *To whom be glory, and honour, and dominion, for ever and ever.* Gal. 1. 5. and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all those places which speak of him as *without beginning*; Psal. 93. 2. *Thou art from everlasting.* Mich. 5. 2. *Whose goings forth have been from everlasting.* Hab. 1. 12. *Art not thou from everlasting? O Lord!* And those which speak of the perpetual continuance of his duration; Psal. 102. 24, 25, 26, 27. *Thy years are throughout all generations; of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed;*

ed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. Vol. VII.

And those which speak of him as the first and the last; Isa. 43.

10. Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me. I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God. And to mention no more, those which speak of his Being, as coexistent to all difference of time, past, present, and, to come, Rev.

1. 8. I am Alpha, and Omega, the beginning, and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.

Thirdly, I shall from hence draw,

I. Some *Doctrinal* Corollaries.

II. Some *Practical* Inferences.

I. *Doctrinal* Corollaries, that you may see how the Perfections of God depend one upon another, and



and may be deduced one from another.

1. *Corol.* From the Eternity of God we may infer that he is of *himself*. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cause of its Being.

2. *Corol.* We may hence infer the *necessity* of his Being. 'Tis necessary every thing should be, when it is; now that which is always, is absolutely necessary, because always so.

3. *Corol.* The *Immutability* of the Divine Nature; for being always, he is necessarily, and being necessarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his Being is as impossible as a cessation. Therefore the Psalmist puts his *Immutability* and *Eternity* together. *Psal.* 102. 27. *But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

II. By way of *Practical* Inference or Application.

I. The

## 1. The consideration of God's

Eternity may serve for the support of our Faith. This *Moses* here useth as a ground of his Faith; *Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place, in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, &c.*

*Psal. 62. 8. Trust in him at all times, ye people.* His *Immensity* is an Argument why all should trust in him, he is a present help to all; and why they should trust in him at all times, his *Eternity* is an Argument, *Deut. 33. 27. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*

There are two Attributes which are the proper Objects of our Faith and Confidence, God's *Goodness*, and his *Power*, both these are Eternal; *the goodness of the Lord endureth for ever*, as it is frequently in the *Psalms*: And his *Power* is Eternal; the *Apostle* speaks of his *Eternal Power*, as well as *Godhead*; *Rom. 1. 20. Isa. 26.*

4. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is ever-*

B b

lasting

*lasting strength. Isa. 40. 28. The  
Vol. VII. everlasting God, the Lord, the crea-  
tour of the ends of the earth fainteth  
not, neither is weary.*

We cannot trust in men, be-  
cause there is nothing in man to  
be a Foundation of our Confidence;  
his good will towards us may  
change, his Power may faint, and  
he may grow weary; or if these  
continue, yet they that have a  
mind and a power to help us,  
themselves may fail; therefore the  
Psalmist useth this consideration of  
mens mortality, to take us off  
from confidence in man, *Psal.*  
*146. 3, 4. Put not your trust in*  
*Princes, nor in the son of man, in*  
*whom there is no help; his breath go-*  
*eth forth, he returneth to his earth,*  
*in that very day his thoughts perish.*  
*Isa. 2. 22. Cease ye from man,*  
*whose breath is in his nostrils; for*  
*wherein is he to be accounted of?*  
The greatest of the Sons of Men are  
but *lying* refuges to the everlasting  
God; they are but *broken reeds* to the  
*rock of Ages.*

And


And this may support our Faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our posterity, and the condition of God's Church to the end of the World. When we die we may leave ours and the Church in his hands, who *lives for ever, and reigns for ever.* The enemies of God's Church, and those who have the most malicious designs against it, what ever share they may have in the affairs of the World, they can but domineer for a while, they must die, and *that very day their thoughts perish* : But *thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.*

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We serve the God who can give us an everlasting reward. The reward of the next Life is called *Eternal Life, an Eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. 4. 17. *Eternal Salvation*, Heb. 5. 9.. *an Eternal Inheritance*, Heb. 9. 15. That place where good Men shall be rewarded is called, *everlasting*

B b 2

*habi-*



 habitations, Luke 16. 9. a house  
Vol. VII. *Eternal in the heavens*, 2 Cor. 5.

1. As the promise of our future reward is founded in the *Goodness* of God, and the greatness of it in his *Power*, so the duration of it in his *Eternity*. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we serve him and suffer for him who *lives for ever*, and will make us happy for ever? When we serve the great men of this World, tho' we be secure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this discourageth many, and makes men worship the rising Sun, and many times takes off mens eyes from *the King* to his *Successor*: but he that serves God, serves *the King everlasting*, as the Apostle calls him, who will live to dispen- ce rewards to all those who are faithful to him.

3. For the terrour of wicked men. The Sentence which shall be past upon men at the day of judgment, is call'd *Eternal Judgment*, Heb. 6. 2. because it decides mens Eter-

Eternal state ; the Punishment that shall follow this Sentence which shall pass upon the wicked, is called, *Everlasting punishment*, Matt. 25. 46. *Everlasting fire*. Matt. 25. 41. *Everlasting destruction*, 2 Thes. 2. 9. *The vengeance of Eternal fire*, Jude 7. *The smoke of the bottomless pit*, is said to ascend for ever and ever, Rev. 14. 11. and the wicked to be tormented day and night, for ever and ever. Rev. 20. 10. Now as the punishment of wicked men is founded in the Justice of God ; and the greatness of it in his Power ; so the perpetuity and continuance of it in his Eternity. The Apostle saith Heb. 10. 31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* ; because he that lives for ever, can punish for ever ; as the Eternal Demerit of sin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive the never dying worm, so the wrath of the Eternal God blows up the Eternal Flame.

How should this awaken in us a fear of the Eternal God ! Sinners,

B b 3

what

  
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what a folly is it, for the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, to incense that Justice which will Punish and torment you for ever ! As good men shall have the everlasting God for their Reward, and their Happiness; so wicked men shall have him for their Judge and Avenger.

We fear the wrath of men, whose power is short, and whose breath is in their nostrils, who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Dost thou fear man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as grass ? and is not the wrath of the Eternal God much more terrible ? Luke 12. 4, 5. And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do : but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear ; fear him, who after he hath kill'd, hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, fear him. The wrath of man is despicable, because it hath bounds and limits ; the fury of man can but reach to the body, it can go no further ;

further; it expires with this life, it cannot follow us beyond the Grave: Vol. VII.

But the wrath of *the Eternal God* doth not only reach *the Body*, but *the Soul*; it is not confin'd to this Life, but pursues us to the other World, and extends it self to all Eternity.

*Fear him, who after he hath kill'd, hath power to cast into hell, that is, to inflict Eternal Torments; Yea, I say unto you, fear him.*

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Bb 4 Ser-

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32

# SERMON XIV.

The Incomprehensibleness of  
God.

JOB XI. 7.

*Canst thou by searching find out  
God? Canst thou find out the Al-  
mighty unto perfection?*

**I**N treating of the Properties and  
Perfections of God, I shall at  
present consider that which  
results from the infinite excellency  
of his Nature and Perfection, com-  
pared with the Imperfection of our  
understandings, which is common-  
ly call'd the *Incomprehensibleness* of  
God. This you have expressed here  
in

*Vol. VII.* in the words of Zophar, *Canst thou by searching find out God? &c.*

There is no great difficulty in the words; *Canst thou by searching find out God, potesne peruestigare intima dei*, so Castalio Translates it, Dost thou know God intimately, and thoroughly, within and without? Canst thou pierce into the center of his Perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? and, *Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* Canst thou find out the Almighty, *usque ad ultima*, to the very last and utmost of him? so as thou canst say after a thorough search and enquiry, "There is no Perfection in God beyond this, There is nothing of him now that remains to be known; *this* he is, and no other; *that* he is, and no otherwise; *this* he can do, and no more; *hither* doth his Knowledge, and Power, and Wisdom reach, and no further.

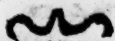
*Canst*

*Canst thou do this?* These interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had said, *no, thou canst not; God is unsearchable, he is Incomprehensible.*

The two Questions in the Text seem to be only two several expressions of the same thing. The first Question is undoubtedly general, concerning the Nature and Perfections of God in general; *Canst thou by searching find out God?* Canst thou by the most diligent search and enquiry come to a perfect Knowledge and Understanding of him?

The second Question may seem to be a particular instance to the general truth implied in the first question; he seems to instance in his Power; as if he had said, *God is unsearchable*, and then had instanced in a particular Perfection, *the power of God.* *Canst thou by searching find out God?* Thou canst



 canst not comprehend the Divine  
 Vol. VII. Nature and Perfections in general; *Canst thou find out the Almighty to Perfection?* Consider particularly his *Power*, and see if thou canst know the utmost of that. But I rather think that the latter Question is altogether the same in sense with the former; and that the Attribute of *Almighty*, which is here given to God, is used by way of description, and not intended by way of instance. *Canst thou find out the Almighty, that is God, to Perfection?* Which way soever we take the Words, it is not much material; we may ground this *Observation* upon them.

*That God is Incomprehensible.*

This term or Attribute is a relative term, and speaks a relation between an Object and a Faculty, between God and a Created Understanding; so that the meaning of it is plainly this, That no Created understanding  
 can

can comprehend God, that is, have a perfect and exact knowledge of him, such a knowledge as is adequate to the Perfection of the Object: Or thus, the Nature and Perfections of God are above the understanding of any of his Creatures; it is only his own infinite understanding that can frame a perfect Idea of his own Perfection. God knows himself, his own understanding comprehends his own Perfections: But he is *Incomprehensible to his Creatures.*

Indeed there is nothing more obvious than God; for *he is not far from every one of us, in him we live, and move, and have our Being*; there need no great search to find out that there is a God; *An eternal power and Deity are clearly seen in the things which are made,* as the Apostle tells us; but the *manner* of the Being, and Properties, and Perfections of this God, these cannot be comprehended by a finite understanding. I shall

shall prove the Doctrine, and then  
Vol. VII. apply it.

*First*, For the proof of it. I will attempt it these *three* ways.

I. By way of instance, or induction of particulars.

II. By way of conviction.

III. By giving the clear reason of it.

I. By way of instance. And I shall give you instances both on the part of the *Object*; and of the *Subject*, or the persons who are capable of knowing God in any degree.

i. On the part of the *Object*. The Nature of God, the Excellency and Perfection of God, the Works and Ways of God are above our thoughts and apprehensions. The Nature of God; it is vast and infinite, *Job 36. 26. God is great, and we know him not. Job 37. 23. Touch-*

23. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out. Psal. 145. 3. *His greatness is unsearchable.* Vol. VII.

The Excellencies and Perfections of God; his Immensity, 2 Chron. 2. 6. *The heaven of heavens cannot contain him:* The Eternity of his duration, *from everlasting to everlasting he is God.* We cannot imagine any limits of his presence, nor bounds of his duration: The infiniteness of his knowledge, Psal. 147. 5. *his understanding is infinite.* When we think of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God, our best way is to fall into admiration, Rom. 11. 33. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

Where the Scripture speaks of those Perfections of God, which the Creatures do in some measure and degree partake of, as his Goodness; and Power, and Wisdom, and Holiness, and Immortality, it attributes them in such a peculiar and Divine manner to God, as doth exclude and shut out



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out the Creature from any claim or share or title to them, *Matt. 19. 16, 17. Why Call'st thou me good; there's none good but one, that is God. 1 Tim. 6. 15, 16. Who is the blessed and only potentate, who only hath immortality. 1 Tim. 1. 17. The only wise God. Rev. 15. 4. For thou only art holy.* In so inconceivable a manner doth God possess these Perfections which he Communicates, and we can only understand them as he Communicates them, and not as he possesses them; so that when we consider any of these Divine Perfections, we must not frame Notions of them contrary to what they are in the Creature, nor must we limit them by what they are in the Creature, but say, the Goodness and the Wisdom of God are all this which is in the Creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend; the transcendent degree, and the singularity of these Divine Perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The

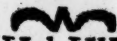
The Works of God, they are likewise unsearchable; *the Works of Creation and of Redemption.* Job 5. 9. *Which doth great things, and unsearchable, marvelous, things past finding out:* And then he instanceth in the Works of God, Job 26. 14. *Lo these are part of his ways: But how little a portion is heard of him? and the thunder of his voice who can understand?* So that he tells us expressly, we cannot find out the Works of God, we do but know part of them. The question which he puts, Job 37. 16. *Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?* can only be answered by the words of the Psalmist, Psal. 104. 24. *O Lord how wonderful are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.* The work of *Redemption*: In this there shines forth such Wisdom, Mercy, and Love, as our understandings cannot reach; this work is called *the Wisdom of God in a mystery, hidden Wisdom*, σοφία ἀποκρυ-

C C

μην,

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μὲν, 1 Cor. 2. 7. The Mercy, and Grace, and Love of it is called, *the riches of Gods mercy, the exceeding riches of his grace*, Eph. 2. 4, 7. Now Riches is when you cannot tell the utmost of them, *pauperis est numerare*, Eph. 3. 18, 19. That ye may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. When we have the largest apprehensions of this love, so that we think we comprehend it and know it, *it passeth knowledge*; yea the Effects of God's Power and Love which he manifests in believers are unspeakable; for *he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us*, Eph. 3. 20. The Peace which guards their souls *passeth all understanding*, Phil. 4. 7. Those Joys which fill their hearts are *not to be expressed*. 1 Pet. 1. 8. We read of *Joy unspeakable and full of glory*. The Happiness which they

they hope for is inconceivable,   
'tis that which eye hath not seen, Vol. VII  
nor ear heard, nor hath entred into  
the heart of man, which God hath  
laid up for us.

The Ways of God's Providence,  
they are not to be traced, Psal.  
77. 19. *Thy way is in the sea, and  
thy paths in the great waters, and  
thy footsteps are not known.* Ec-  
cles. 3. 11. *No man can find out  
the work that God maketh from  
the beginning to the end.* We are  
but of yesterday, and know nothing.  
When we look upon Gods Pro-  
vidence, we take a part from the  
whole, and consider it by it self,  
without relation to the whole se-  
ries of his Dispensation; we can-  
not see the whole of God's Pro-  
vidence at one view, and never  
see from the beginning of the  
Works of God to the end; there-  
fore our knowledgē of them  
must needs be very imperfect,  
and full of mistakes, and false  
judgments of things; we cannot  
by our petty and short-sighted  
C c 2      designs,



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designs, judge of the Works of God, and the Designs of Providence; for *our ways are not as his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts. but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts, Isa. 55. 8, 9. The ways of God's Mercy, Psal. 103. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God's mercy. Psal. 139. 17, 18. How precious are thy thoughts unto me? how great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. And the ways of God's Judgments; the severity and greatness of his Judgment is not known, Psal. 90. Who knoweth the power of thy anger? And who may stand before thee when thou art angry? And the Reasons of his Judgments are unsearchable, Psal. 36. 6. Thy Judgments are a great deep. Rom. 11. 35. How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out! These are the Instances on the part of the Object.*

2. On

2. On the part of the *Subject*, Vol. VII.  
or the persons capable of know-  
ing God in any measure. The per-  
fect knowledge of God is above  
a finite Creature's understanding.

Wicked men they are ignorant of  
God, and full of false apprehen-  
sions of him; the Scripture gives  
this description of them; they are  
those that *know not God*, 2 *Theff.*

1. Wicked men are so far from  
knowing God to Perfection, that  
they have hardly any true know-  
ledge of him; for as the man him-  
self is, so will God seem to be to  
him; the Idea and Notion which  
men have of God, is but the pi-  
cture of their own complexion.  
To a true knowledge there is re-  
quired likeness; a Man's mind  
must be like the thing he would  
understand; therefore the Apostle  
tells us, *the natural, or animal man,*  
*doth not receive the things of God,* he  
is not capable of them, because  
his mind is unsuitable to them, he  
is *πλήρης τῆ σάρκατος*, full of body,  
and he cannot relish *spiritual things*;

C c 3

even

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even those Natural notions which wicked men have of God, they are strangely tinctur'd and obscured by the temper of the man; they are *lux sepulta in opacâ materiâ*, light buried and hid in matter and darkness, in the blackness of a foul and impure heart; so that there is no question of *them*, whither *they* comprehend God or not.

But good men they *cannot find out God*, they have some false apprehensions of him; all their apprehensions are dark, have much of obscurity in them; they know God to *Salvation*, but not to *Perfection*; in this life we do but know God *in part*, that is, in comparison of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will instance yet higher; the Angels and the Spirits of just men made perfect; tho' they have *true* apprehensions of God, yet they do not arrive to *perfect* knowledge of him, they cannot *peruestigare ultima*, know the utmost of God; the Cherubims themselves  
are

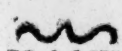
are continually looking at the Mercy Seat. To which the Apostle alludes, 1 Pet. 1. 12. when he tells us, the Myſtery of God's mercy in the Goſpel was a thing *which the Angels deſired to pry into*. In Heaven *that which is in part ſhall be done away*, that is, our knowledge ſhall be perfect as our Natures are capable; but it ſhall be *finite*. When we ſhall *ſee God face to face*, that is, have an immediate viſion of him, and *ſee him as he is*, that is, not having our underſtandings tinctur'd by any luſt or paſſion that may darken our mind, or miſrepreſent the Object; for the Apoſtle tells us, *we ſhall ſee him, becauſe we ſhall be like him*; yet then we ſhall have ſhort and unadequate apprehenſions of him, we ſhall ſtill retain our limited Natures and finite underſtandings.

II. By way of Conviction. Doſt thou know perfectly the nature of a finite Spirit, the Perfection and the Power of an Angel, how being immaterial they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no reſiſtance to a Spirit?

C c 4

Doſt



Vol. VII.  Dost thou know how they can move themselves to a great distance in a moment, and dart themselves from one part of the World to another? Dost thou know how man is *formed in the lowest parts of the earth*, as the Psalmist expresseth it; and the curious Frame of our Bodies is wrought from such rude Principles in so dark a Shop? Canst thou give an account how the Soul is united to the Body, by what bands or holds a Spirit is so closely and intimately conjoined to Matter? Dost thou know how thy self understandest any thing, and canst retain the distinct Ideas and Notions of so many Objects without confusion? Dost thou know the least parts of Matter, how they are knit together, and by what Cement they cleave so fast to one another, that they can hardly be separated?

Now if the Creatures be so unsearchable, and the knowledge of these be too hard for thee; is not the Creator

Creator of them much more Incomprehensible, who possesseth all these Perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a Creature? If in Natural and Sensible Things, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*, how much more is it true of God, that *our ignorance is more than our knowledge*; when the whole Earth and all the Creatures bear no proportion to him? *Isa. 40. 15, 17. Behold all the Nations of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as the small dust of the ballance; all nations before him are nothing, and are accounted to him less than nothing.*

III. By shewing you the clear Reason of it, which is this, the disproportion between the Faculty and the Object, the finiteness of our understandings, and the Infiniteness of the Divine Nature and Perfections. *God is greater than our hearts*, and therefore as he knows

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knows more than we do, as the Apostle reasons, 1 John 3. 20. so he is more than can be known by us; he is too vast an Object for our understanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou may'st as well mete out the Heaven with a span, and measure the Waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the dust of the earth in a little Urn, and weigh the Mountains in some Scales, and the hills in a little Ballance; as think to circumscribe God in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compass of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vastness and greatness of the Object; but the Glory and Resplendency of it does so dazle our sight, that we cannot perfectly see it, 1 Tim. 6. 16. *He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.* As God is too big, so he is too bright an Object for our understandings; the  
presence

presence of his Glory overpowers our minds, and bears down our Faculties, and conquers our understandings.

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I come now to apply this Doctrine of the Incomprehensibleness of the Divine Nature. If the Nature, and Perfections, and Ways, and Works of God be Incomprehensible, and past finding out,

I. It calls for our Admiration, and Veneration, and Reverence. These are the best apprehensions of him, that is Incomprehensible; a silent Veneration of his Excellencies, is the best acknowledgment of them. We must admire what we cannot apprehend or express, *Zach. 9. 17. How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty?* The best way to celebrate the praises of God, is that which *Nehemiah* useth *Nehem. 9. 5. And blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.* When



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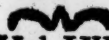
When ever we speak or think of God, we necessarily detract from his Perfections; but even this necessity is glorious to him, and this speaks his Perfection, that the highest finite understanding must have imperfect thoughts of him.

We should make up in Reverence and Veneration what we fall short of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of distance; by our reverence of the Divine Majesty, we should best awe our hearts, in a sense of the distance which is between his infinite Nature and Perfection, and our finite apprehensions. Worldly greatness will cause wonder, the thoughts of Earthly Majesty will compose us to Reverence; how much more should those excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine! *Isa. 6.* you have there God represented sitting upon his throne, and the Seraphims about him, which are described to us as having each six wings, and with twain they cover their

*their faces.* Creatures of the brightest understanding; and the most exalted purity and Holiness, *cover their faces* in the presence of God's glory, they choose rather to venerate God than look upon him

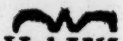
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II. This calls for humility and modesty. The consideration of God's unsearchable Perfections should make *the haughtiness of man to stoop, and bring down his proud looks, and God alone should be exalted.* The thought of God's Excellency should abase us, and make us *vile in our own eyes*, it should make all those petty Excellencies that we pride our selves in to vanish and disappear. *Those treasures of wisdom and knowledge* which are in God, should *hide pride from man.* It should hide those little parts and gifts which we are so apt to glory in, as the Sun hides the Stars. When we consider God, we should be so far from admiring our selves, that we should with an humble thankfulness wonder that

  
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that God should regard such inconsiderable nothings as we are *Psal. 8. 1, 3, 4.* O Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the Moon and the Stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man, that thou visitest him? He that considers the Glory of God, and the greatness of his Works, will think so meanly of himself, that he will be astonished that God should mind him or visit him. This is a noble strain of humility in *David*, by which he acknowledgeth that the greatest King of the Earth, how considerable soever he may be in respect of men, is yet but a pitiful thing to God.

When we speak to God, we should do it with great humility, *Eccles. 5. 2, 3.* Let thy words be few, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth. We should say  
to

to God, *Job* 37. 19. Teach us  what we shall say unto thee, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. And when we think or speak of him, we should do it with great modesty; we should not rashly pronounce or determine any thing concerning God. *Simonides* being ask'd what God was, desired one days time to consider, then he desired two, and then four. The more we think of God, the less peremptory shall we be in defining him. He that considers that God is Incomprehensible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmost of infinite Power, and all the Reasons of God's Ways and Providences. He that rightly values his own short understanding, and the unlimited Perfections of God, will not be apt to say, this God cannot do, this he cannot know, such ways are not agreeable to his wisdom. He that knows God and himself, will be modest in these cases, he will ἐνέχειν, abstain from per-



Vol. VII. peremptory pronouncing in these matters; he considers that one man many times differs so much from another in knowledge and skill of working, that he can do those things which another believes impossible: but we have pitiful thoughts of God, if we think the difference between one man and another, is any thing to the vast distance that is between the Divine Understanding and our ignorance, the Divine Power and our weakness, the Wisdom of God and the folly of men.

III. The Incomprehensibleness of God's Perfections calls for the highest degree of our affection. How should we fear this great and glorious God! *Psal. 90. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.* Fear is the most infinite of all our passions, and fills us with the most endless jealousy and suspicions; God's wrath is greater than our fear, *according to thy fear so is thy wrath.*

How

How should we love him, when we are astonisht with admiration of God's goodness, and say, *how great is thy goodness, and how great is thy beauty! Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us! How great should our love be to him! What manner of love should we return to him!*

This calls for the highest degree of our Faith. With what confidence should we rely upon him, *who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think!*

To conclude, This requires the highest degree of our service: How should our hearts be *enlarged to run the ways of his commandments, who hath laid up for us such things, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man!*

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SER.



# SERMON XV.

God the first Cause, and last  
End.

ROM XI. 36.

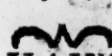
*For of him, and through him, and  
to him are all things, to whom  
be Glory for ever. Amen.*

**H**AVING consider'd the more  
Eminent and Absolute Per-  
fections of the Divine  
Nature, as also that which re-  
sults from the infinite Excellency  
and Perfection of God, compar'd  
with the Imperfection of our Un-  
derstandings, I come in the last  
place to treat of such as are mere-

D d 2

ly



Vol. VII.  ly and purely *Relative*; as that He is *the first Cause, and the last End* of all things; to which purpose I have chosen these words of the Apostle, for the Subject of my present Discourse; *For of him, and through him &c,*

The dependence of these Words upon the former is briefly this. The Apostle had been speaking before in this Chapter, several things that might tend to raise us to an Admiration of the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Mercy of God, in the dispensation of his Grace, for the Salvation of men, both *Jews* and Gentiles, and therefore would have us ascribe this work wholly to God; the contrivance of it to his Wisdom, and not to our own counsel, v. 34. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord? and who hath been his counsellour? and the bestowing this grace, to his free Goodness and Mercy, and not to any desert of ours, v. 35. Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?*

*and last End.*

405

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*again?* Yea, and not only in the dispensation of Grace, but of all good things; not only in this work of Redemption, but also of Creation, God is the Fountain, and Original, and *first Cause*, from whence every thing proceeds; and *the last End*, to which every thing is to be referr'd. *For of him, &c.* Ἐξ αὐτοῦ, *from him*, the efficient Cause producing all things; δι' αὐτοῦ, *by, or through him*, as the efficient conserving Cause of all things; εἰς αὐτόν, *and to him*, as the final Cause of all things, and the End for which they were made.

The Proposition I shall speak to is, that God is the *first Cause*, and *last End*.

*First*, I shall a little Explain the Terms.

*Secondly*, Confirm the Proposition.

D d .3      *Thirdly*,

## Thirdly, Apply it.

First, For the Explication of the Terms.

I. That God is the *first Cause* signifies,

1. Negatively, that he had no Cause, did not derive his Being from any other, or does depend upon any other Being; but that he was always, and eternally of himself.

2. Positively, that he is *the Cause* of all things besides himself, the Fountain and Original of all Created Beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend; or, that I may use the expression of Saint John, *Joh. 1. 3.* which I know is appropriated to the Second Person in the Trinity, *By him all things were made, and without him was nothing made that was made.* So that when we attribute to God, that he

he is the *first*, we mean, that there was nothing before him, and that he was before all things, and that all things are by him.

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II. *The last End*, that is, that all things refer to him; that is, the design and aim of all things that are made, is the Illustration of God's Glory some way or other, and the manifestation of his Perfections.

*Secondly*, For the Confirmation, I shall briefly, according to my usual Method, attempt it these two ways.

I. By Natural light. The Notion of a God contains in it all possible Perfection. Now the utmost Perfection we can imagine is; for a Being to be always of it self, before all other Beings, and not only so, but to be the Cause of all other Beings; that is, that there should be nothing, but what derives its Being from him, and continually depends upon him;

D d 4 from




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from whence follows, that all things must refer to him, as their *last End*. For every wise Agent acts with design, and in order to an End. Now the End is that which is best, which is most worthy the attaining, and that is God himself. Now his Being and Perfections are already, and the best next to the *existence* of his Being and Perfections, is the *manifestation* of them, which is called God's *Glory*; and this is the highest End that we can imagine, to which all the Effects of the Divine Power and Goodness, and Wisdom do refer.

And that these Titles are to be attributed to God, is not only reasonable, when it is revealed and discovered, but was discovered by the Natural light of the heathens. Hence it was that *Aristotle* gives to God those Titles of *the first Being, the first Cause, and the first Mover*; and his Master *Plato* calls God *the Author, and Parent of all things, the Maker and Architect of the World,*  
and

and of all Creatures; the Fountain and Original of all things. Porphyry calls him τὸ πρῶτον, the first, from whence he Reasons to this sense, that he is the ultimate end, and that all things move towards God, that all motions center in him; because, saith he, it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their Original, and to refer all to him, from whom they receive all. Antoninus, the Emperour and Philosopher, speaking of Nature (which with the Stoicks signified God) hath these words, which are so very like these of the Apostle, that they may seem to be taken from him; ἐκ σὺ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὺ πάντα, Of thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee are all things.

II. From Scripture. Hither belong all those places where he declares himself to be the first, and the last, Isa. 41. 4. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last.

 I am he. Isa. 43. 10. Before me  
 Vol. VII. there was no God formed, (or as it  
 is in the margin) there was nothing  
 formed of God, neither shall there  
 be after me. Isa. 44. 6. I am the  
 first, and I am the last, and be-  
 sides me there is no God. Isa. 48.  
 12, 13. I am the first, I also am  
 the last, my hand hath laid the foun-  
 dation of the earth, my right hand  
 hath spread the heavens; which is  
 as much as to say, he made the  
 World, and was the first Cause  
 of all things. Rev. 1. 8. I am  
 Alpha and Omega, the beginning and  
 the end, saith the Lord, which is,  
 and which was, and which is to  
 come.

But more expressly, 1 Cor. 8. 6.  
 But to us there is but one God,  
 the father, of whom are all things,  
 and we by him,  $\kappa\acute{\iota}$  ἡμεῖς ἐκ αὐτοῦ, and  
 we to him, and for him. Acts 17.  
 24. God that made the world, and  
 all things therein. v. 25. He giv-  
 eth to all life, and breath, and all  
 things. v. 28. In him we live, and  
 move, and have our Being. v. 29.  
 For

For as much then as we are the off-  
spring of God.

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Hither we may refer those Texts which attribute the same to the Second Person in the Trinity, as the Eternal Wisdom and Word of God, whereby all things were made, *Joh. 1. 3. All things were made by him, and without him was nothing made, that was made, v. 10. And the World was made by him. 1 Cor. 8. 6. And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Eph. 3. 9. God, who Created all things by Jesus Christ. Col. 1. 16. By him were all things Created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were Created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Heb. 1. 2. By whom also he made the Worlds. And, v. 3. Upholding all things by the word of his power.*

Thirdly,



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*Thirdly*, and lastly, to apply this Doctrine.

*Use. First*, If God be the *first Cause* of all things, who did at first produce all Creatures, and does since Preserve them and Govern them, and disposeth of all their concernments, and orders all things that befall them, from hence let us learn,

1. With Humility and Thankfulness to own and acknowledge, and admire and bless God as the Author and Original of our Being, as the Spring and Fountain of all the Blessings and good things that we enjoy. If we do but consider what these words signifie, that God is *the first Cause* of all things, we shall see great Reason to own and acknowledge, to adore and praise him, and that with the greatest humility; because we have not given him any thing, but have received all from

from him; he is the Cause of all things, who did freely and of his own good will and pleasure communicate Beings to us, without any constraint or necessity, but what his own goodness laid upon him, *Rev. 4. 11. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast Created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were Created.* We could not, before we were, deserve any thing from him, or move him by any Arguments, or importune him by intreaties to make us; but he freely gave us Being; and ever since we depend upon him, and have been preserved by him, and cannot subsist one moment without the continued influence of the Power and Goodness which first called us out of nothing. He is the Author of all the good, and the Fountain of all those Blessing, which for the present we enjoy, and for the future hope for.

When

  
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When he made us at first, he designed us for Happiness; and when we by our sin and wilful miscalriage fell short of the Happiness which he design'd us for, he sent his Son into the World for our recovery, and gave his life for the Ransom of our Souls. He hath not only admitted us into a new Covenant, wherein he hath promised pardon, and eternal life to us; but he hath also purchased these Blessings for us, by the most endearing price, the blood of his own Son, and hath saved us in such a manner as may justly astonish us. Upon these Considerations we should awaken ourselves to the praise of God, and with the holy Psalmist, call up our Spirits, and summon all the Powers and Faculties of our Souls, to assist us in this Work, *Psalm. 103. 1, 2, 3, 4. &c. Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who*  
*healeth*

*healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness, and tender mercies ; 'tis he that satisfies our Souls with good things, and crowneth us with tender mercies, and loving kindness; that hath promised Eternal Life and Happiness to us, and must confer and bestow this upon us; Therefore our Souls and all that is within us should bless his holy name.*

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2. If God be *the first Cause*, that is, orders all things that befall us, and by his Providence disposeth of all our concernments, this should teach us with patience, and quietness, to submit to all Events, to all evils and afflictions, that come upon us, as being disposed by his wise Providence, and coming from him. We are apt to attribute all things to the next and immediate Agent, and to look no higher than Second Causes; not considering that all the motions of Natural Causes are directly subordinate to the first Cause, and  
all



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all the actions of free Creatures are under the Government of God's wise Providence, so that nothing happens to us besides the design and intention of God.

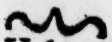
And methinks this is one particular Excellency of the style of the Scripture above all other Books, that the constant Phrase of the Sacred Dialect is to attribute all Events (excepting sins only) to God, so that every one that reads it cannot but take notice, that it is wrote with a more attentive consideration of God than any other Book, as appears by those frequent and express acknowledgments of God as the Cause of all Events; so that what in other Writers would be said to be done by this or that Person, is ascribed to God. Therefore it is so often said, that *the Lord did* this, and that, stirr'd up such an Enemy, brought such a Judgment. And we shall find that holy men in Scripture make excellent use of this consideration, to argue themselves into patience and contentedness

edness in every condition. So *Eli*,  
*1 Sam. 3. 18. It is the Lord, let*  
*him do what seemeth him good.* So  
*Job*, he did not so consider the *Sa-*  
*beans* and *Chaldeans* who had carri-  
 ed away his Oxen and his Camels,  
 and slain his Servants; nor the  
 Wind which had thrown down his  
 House, and kill'd his Sons, and his  
 Daughters; but he looks up to God,  
 the great Governour and Disposer  
 of all these Events; *The Lord giv-*  
*eth, and the Lord hath taken away,*  
*blessed be the name of the Lord.* So  
*David, Psal. 39. 9. I was dumb*  
*and spake not a word, because thou*  
*Lord didst it.* So our Blessed Savi-  
 our, when he was ready to suffer,  
 he did not consider the malice of  
 the *Jews*, which was the cause of  
 his death; but looks to a higher  
 hand; *the cup which my father gives*  
*me to drink, shall not I drink it?*

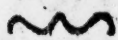
He that looks upon all things as  
 coming from second Causes, and  
 does not eye the first Cause, the  
 good and wise Governour, will  
 be apt to take offence at every cross  
 and unwelcome accident. Men are

E e

apt


 apt to be angry, when one flings  
Vol. VII. Water upon them as they pass in  
the Streets; but no man is offend-  
ed, if he is wet by Rain from Hea-  
ven. When we look upon Evils as  
coming only from men, we are apt to  
be impatient, and know not how to  
bear them; but we should look up-  
on all things as under the Govern-  
ment and disposal of the first Cause,  
and the Circumstances of every con-  
dition as allotted to us by the wise  
Providence of God; this Consider-  
ation, that it is the hand of God,  
and that he hath done it, would  
still all the murmurings of our  
Spirits. As when a Seditious Mul-  
titude is in an uproar, the presence  
of a grave and venerable person will  
hush the noise, and quell the tumult;  
so if we would but represent God  
as present to all actions, and govern-  
ing and disposing all Events, this  
would still and appease our Spirits,  
when they are ready to riot and  
mutiny against any of his Dispensa-  
tions.

*Use*

*Use the Second.* If God be *the*  Vol. VII.  
*last End* of all, let us make  
 him our last End, and refer all our  
 Actions to his glory. This is that  
 which is due to him, as he is  
*the first Cause*, and therefore he  
 does most reasonably require it of  
 us.

And herein likewise the Scri-  
 pture doth excel all other Books,  
 that is, doth more frequently and  
 expressly mind us of this End, and  
 calls upon us to propose it to our  
 selves as our ultimate aim and de-  
 sign. We should love him as our  
 chief End, *Mat. 22. 37. Thou*  
*shalt love the Lord thy God with all*  
*thy heart, and with all thy soul, and*  
*with all thy mind.* Thus to love  
 God is that which, in the lan-  
 guage of the Schools, is loving  
 God as our *Chief End*. So likewise  
 the Apostle requires, that we should  
 refer all the Actions of our lives  
 to this End, *1 Cor. 10. 31. Whe-*  
*ther ye eat or drink, do all to the*  
*glory of God; that we should glorifie*



  
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*him in our souls, and in our bodies, which are his.* He is the Author of all the powers that we have, and therefore we should use them for him ; we do all *by* him, and therefore we should do all *to* him.

And that we may the better understand our selves as to this duty, I shall endeavour to give satisfaction to a Question or two which may arise about it.

*First*, Whether an actual intention of God's Glory be necessary to make every Action that we do, good and acceptable to God ?

*Answ.* 1. It is necessary that the glory of God either *Formally* or *Virtually* should be the ultimate end and scope of our lives, and all our Actions; otherwise they will be defective in that which in moral Actions is most considerable, and that is *the End*. If a man should keep all the Commandments of the Gospel, this excepted of making God's glory his Supreme End, only

ly with a design to gain reputation, or some other advantage in the World, this very thing would vitiate all, and render him unacceptable to God. Vol. VII.

2. It is very requisite and convenient, as a good sign, that we should very frequently, actually think upon, and intend this End; for if it be very much out of our thoughts, we have some reason to be jealous of our selves, that we do not intend it at all.

3. It is so far from being necessary, that we should in every Action have this intention of God's glory, that it is not morally possible that we should; no more than it is possible, that a man that goes a Journey of a thousand miles, should every step he takes have actual thoughts of his Journey's end: nor is it more necessary; for consideration of the end is only so far necessary, as it is necessary to guide and quicken us in the use of means; as it is not necessary for a man to think of

his journey's end, further than to  
 Vol. VII. direct and excite him to go thither.  
 And this appears further by the contrary; it is not necessary to make a sinful Action, that a man should *Formally*, much less *Actually* intend God's dishonour; it is enough to constitute a man a wicked man, if he willingly transgress God's Law, the doing whereof does by consequence reflect a dishonour upon him: so on the other hand, it is sufficient to make an Action good and acceptable, if it be conformable to God's Law, and such as by consequence redounds to God's glory.

*Second Question.* Whether the Glory of God may, or ought to be considered, as an End separate and distinct from our own Happiness?

*Answ.* I shall speak but briefly to this, because I have elsewhere spoken to it; but in that little which I have to say for satisfaction to this Question, I will proceed by these steps.

I. By

I. By the glory of God, we mean the Demonstration, or Illustration, or Manifestation of some or all of his Perfections, more especially his Goodness, and Mercy, and Justice, and Wisdom, and Power, and Holiness.

II. It is plain that the manifestation of some of these Perfections is a thing that may be separated from the Happiness of a Creature; for his Holiness, and Justice, and Power, may and shall be manifested in the final and eternal ruin of impenitent sinners.

III. The Manifestation of any of God's Perfections, ought many times to be propounded by us as an end distinct and separate from our respective Happiness; such a Happiness, as respects only some particulars, and some particular duration, in opposition to absolute and Eternal Happiness. In this sense our Saviour says, that he *sought not his own Glory, but the Glory of him that sent him*; by which he

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does



  
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does not mean, that he quitted everlasting Glory and Happiness; but that in order to the glory of God, he did for a time lay aside his own glory, and divest himself of it while he was in this World; for the Apostle tells us, that he was encouraged to do this out of a respect to a greater glory, *Heb. 12. 2. Who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* And in this sense, we are to understand the command of self-denial in the Gospel, with reference to our particular or temporal, not our eternal interest; and that it is no more, is plain from the Argument our Saviour uses to encourage this self-denial, the promise of a far greater Happiness than that we deny; no man that *forsakes father and mother for my sake, but shall have eternal life*; And proportionably we are to understand those Commands of loving Christ more than our selves, that is, more than any temporal interest.

IV. The

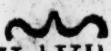
IV. The manifestation of any of God's Perfections, neither ought nor can reasonably be propounded by us, as an End separated from, or opposite to our Eternal Blessedness; that is, we cannot *naturally* or *reasonably* desire the glory of God should be advanced, tho' it were to our final ruin, either by *annihilation*, or *eternal misery*.

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I. We cannot either *naturally*, or *reasonably* desire God should be glorified by our *annihilation*.

(1.) Not *naturally*. Because such a desire would be directly contrary to the natural desire of self-preservation, which God himself hath planted in us, and is most intimate and essential to our Natures.


(2.) Not *reasonably*. Because it is utterly unimaginable, how God can be glorified by the annihilation of a Creature. All the Attributes that we can imagine can be manifested herein, are Power and Sovereignty; his Power hath already been as much manifested in creating


 ting and making the Creature out  
 Vol.VII. of nothing, as it can be by redu-  
 cing it into nothing; for to Create  
 is the very same demonstration of  
 Power, as to annihilate. And as  
 for his Sovereignty, God will ne-  
 ver manifest that in contradic-  
 tion to his Goodness, or Wisdom,  
 or any other Perfection of the Di-  
 vine Nature. To unmake a Crea-  
 ture, and take away the Being  
 which he had given, would argue  
 either a failure of his Goodness to-  
 ward the Creature, or that he did  
 repent he had made it, which would  
 reflect upon his Wisdom and Con-  
 stancy. I do not say, that in Justice  
 God cannot annihilate a Creature;  
 far be it from me; for what he gave  
 was his own, and he may without  
 any wrong to the Creature take it  
 again.

2. Much less can we *naturally*  
 desire that God should be glorified  
 in our *Eternal Misery*. The Reasons  
 which I gave about *annihilation* are  
 stronger here; therefore we can-  
 not *naturally* desire it; nor *reasona-  
 bly*, for the demonstration of his  
 Power,

Power, or Sovereignty, or Justice,  Vol. VII.  
or Holiness, which I think are all the Attributes which we can imagine to be glorified hereby. Not as the Manifestation of his Power ; for that would be as much manifested in the Happiness, as Misery of the Creature : Not of his Sovereignty ; for God will not manifest that in contradiction to his Goodness, upon which nothing can reflect more, than *merely, pro arbitrio, for his pleasure*, to make an innocent Creature for ever miserable : Not his Justice, and Holiness ; for these presuppose sin and demerit in the Creature, out of hatred to which he makes it miserable ; but God hath declared that he esteems himself more glorified by the Obedience and Happiness of his Creatures, than by their sin and destruction ; and if it were reasonable to desire the Justice and Holiness of God might be glorified in my eternal ruin, which I have deserved by sin, this would plainly follow from it, that it were reasonable *to sin, that Justice might abound*, which of the two is a greater Absurdity, than that which the Apostle con-



 condemns, of *sinning that grace may*  
Vol. VII. *abound.*

V. There is a strict and inviolable connexion between the greatest glory of God; and our Obedience and Happiness: I say, between his greatest glory; because he esteems himself more glorified by the Obedience and Happiness of his Creatures, than by their ruin and misery; and that we may believe it, we have his Oath for it, *As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn, and live.* And it is observable, that the Apostle, in 1 Cor. 10. 31, 32, 33. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God, giving none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God; even as I please all men, in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved;* explains the glorifying of God, by edifying, and promoting the Salvation of others.

VI. We may consider the glory of God, as some ways distinct from  
our

our Happiness; that is, we may consider the manifestation of his Goodness, and Mercy, and Wisdom, in our Happiness, as that which results from it: but this is not enough to make it a distinct End, but the same diversly consider'd; as the publick good is that which results from the general good of particular Persons, but cannot reasonably be propounded by any man, as an End distinct from the general Happiness of particular Persons, without ruining and destroying the Notion of publick good.

VII. Tho' considered as we are particular Beings, we can have no greater End than our own Happiness, in which God is eminently glorified, yet as we are part of the whole Creation and Workmanship of God, which is the noblest consideration of our selves, the glory of God which results from the manifestation of all his Perfections in and about his Creatures, is precisely our ultimate End, and yet not an End really distinct from our own Happiness; and therefore

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fore it is most proper, and becoming, and agreeable to the wise style of Scripture, to give our End its denomination, not from the more particular and narrow, but the more noble consideration of our selves, as we are parts of the whole Creation and Workmanship of God; as it is more generous and becoming for the Members of a Civil Society to mention the publick good as their End, than their private Happiness and Advantage, tho' that be so really and effectually promoted by the publick good.

Thus I have finish'd what I propos'd on this Argument, and concerning the Attributes of God in general; *Of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. To Him be Glory for ever. Amen.*

F I N I S.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE Sermons concerning the Divine Attributes, contained in this, and the former Volume, having not been transcrib'd, and consequently not printed, in the Order in which they were preach'd, and there being also two other Sermons publish'd by the most Reverend Author himself, relating to the Divine Being; It may not be unacceptable to the Reader, to present him with a Scheme of the Order in which they seem to have been design'd; *viz.*

- 1 Sermon. Concerning the Existence of God, or the Unreasonableness of Atheism. *Job* 28. 28.
- 1 Sermon. Concerning the Unity of the Divine Nature, and the B. Trinity. *1 Tim.* 2. 15.

*These two publish'd by the Author.*

*These following from the Originals, by Dr. Barker.*

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